

WALTER'S WORD.



WALTER'S WORD:

A Nobel.

By JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "AT HER MERCY," ETC., ETC.



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	PAGE
IN THE SMOKING-CARRIAGE	1
CHAPTER II.	
THE DAUNTLESS THREE.....	14
CHAPTER III.	
THE ARRIVAL	19
CHAPTER IV.	
PENADDON.....	28
CHAPTER V.	
MRS. SHELDON'S REVENGE.....	40
CHAPTER VI.	
IN BEECH STREET	50
CHAPTER VII.	
MR. JOHN PELTER AS MENTOR	61
CHAPTER VIII.	
THE ACADEMY CIRCULAR	67
CHAPTER IX.	
A FIRST BID.....	75
CHAPTER X.	
THE UNKNOWN PATRON	83
CHAPTER XI.	
BARGAINING	91
CHAPTER XII.	
LILY	96

	PAGE
CHAPTER XIII.	
THE COMMISSION	106
CHAPTER XIV.	
NELLIE'S LOVER	113
CHAPTER XV.	
COMING ROUND	122
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE DEBT IS PAID.....	131
CHAPTER XVII.	
SIR REGINALD PROGRESSES	138
CHAPTER XVIII.	
WAR IS DECLARED	145
CHAPTER XIX.	
A CONFIDENTIAL SITTING	153
CHAPTER XX.	
SIR REGINALD IS FRANKNESS ITSELF.....	161
CHAPTER XXI.	
THE NEW BRIDGE	172
CHAPTER XXII.	
BANISHED FROM EDEN ...	181
CHAPTER XXIII.	
A FRIEND IN NEED.....	192
CHAPTER XXIV.	
IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS.....	201
CHAPTER XXV.	
HOW HE DID IT	210
CHAPTER XXVI.	
NEW LODGINGS	215
CHAPTER XXVII.	
DANGER	224

CONTENTS.

vii

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXVIII.	
THE CHASE IN THE CALM	234
CHAPTER XXIX.	
TO THE RESCUE	244
CHAPTER XXX.	
ON THE ROAD	250
CHAPTER XXXI.	
OUTDOOR LODGINGS	259
CHAPTER XXXII.	
THE CAPTAIN AND HIS CAPTIVE	266
CHAPTER XXXIII.	
BRIGAND DISCIPLINE	274
CHAPTER XXXIV.	
FIXING THE PRICE	287
CHAPTER XXXV.	
THE CAVERN	299
CHAPTER XXXVI.	
JOANNA	309
CHAPTER XXXVII.	
HARD TIMES	317
CHAPTER XXXVIII.	
ON PAROLE	325
CHAPTER XXXIX.	
SIR REGINALD TAKES HIS OWN VIEW	340
CHAPTER XL.	
A GLEAM OF HOPE	352
CHAPTER XLI.	
A LAST APPEAL	359
CHAPTER XLII.	
WALTER SETS HIS HOUSE IN ORDER	371

	PAGE
CHAPTER XLIII.	
THE TEMPTER	378
CHAPTER XLIV.	
THE PROMISE KEPT.....	387
CHAPTER XLV.	
LEAP-YEAR.....	396
CHAPTER XLVI.	
THE ESCAPE	404
CHAPTER XLVII.	
"HE IS WORTH ALL LOVE CAN GIVE HIM"	409
CHAPTER XLVIII.	
HOMEWARD BOUND	416

WALTER'S WORD.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE SMOKING-CARRIAGE.

IN a quarter of an hour the mid-day express will leave the terminus at Paddington for the west, and the platform is beginning to fill. Paterfamilias, with his mountains of luggage and oceans of children, is already there. The fidgety maiden lady, who "always likes to be in time," has been there ten minutes ago, and has gone by mistake by "the parliamentary"—a literal exemplification of "more haste less speed," since it "shunts" at Windsor, to enable the express to pass. The old gentleman who prefers to "start comfortably" is ensconced in his favourite corner of the carriage, has acquired his pile of newspapers, seen his "traps" put into the next compartment, and with his head out of window, and his travelling-cap upon it, is urging the guard to signal "All right," since there is surely nothing more to wait for. The two nervous sisters, who, when they must needs travel on "those horrid railways," always do so together, that in death they may not be divided, are sitting, silent, hand in hand, hoping the best, and expecting the worst: their advertisement, addressed "To those who prefer the road to the rail, and are willing to share the expenses of posting to Exeter," having met with no response: they were "journey proud," and could eat no breakfast; but they have some sandwiches in a hand-bag, of which they will partake at Swindon, when the train (thank Heaven) is stationary for ten minutes, and all danger, save that of being run into, is temporarily suspended: as for getting out, that is out of the question, for these horrible trains never wait for ladies, and they would be sure to be left behind. The bride and bridegroom about to pass their honeymoon in Devonshire, have also come,

with the intention of securing a coupé, and are very much disgusted to find that there is no such carriage to be had ; Charles, who has three hundred pounds a year in the Customs, is half-disposed to take a compartment to themselves ; a design which Angelina (already wife-like) combats on the reasonable score of expense ; it is true that there is one carriage with a door in the middle, but the gentleman departing quietly from his creditors is already in possession of its most secluded corner, and they come upon him unawares with a mutual shock. As for the business-men, to whom time (they say, is "such an object ;" and the young gentlemen who never hurry themselves ; and the young gentlemen who think it fine "to shave the train ;" and the ladies who "never have a notion of what o'clock it is" — these will not be here for the next twelve minutes, if they are so fortunate as to arrive in time at all. Of young gentlemen, indeed, there are but two as yet arrived, and these two of the very class that you would have expected to be among the latest. They are both well dressed, though one more fashionably than the other ; they are of too tender years (unless they have been very "imprudent") to have any domestic ties, since, in the eye of the law, one is little more than "an infant," and the other only his senior by a few years ; and they are in a smoking-carriage, which at present they have all to themselves. The anomaly of their being so much before their time seems to strike the younger of the two as it does ourselves, for he removes his pipe to remark : "I hope you have brought me here early enough, Selwyn ; you did not use to be so punctual in your college days, if I remember right : I suppose it is the discipline of the Crimea which has effected the reform."

"Well, you see, old fellow, with a game-arm" (his left arm is in a sling) "and a game-leg" (he has limped across the platform with the aid of his friend, and also of a crutch), "one feels a little helpless ; and hurry and bustle are to a poor cripple like myself" —

"My dear fellow," interrupts the other effusively, his comely face blushing to the roots of his brown beard, "don't say another word ; I am ashamed of myself for having forgotten your misfortune even for an instant. I ought to have four legs myself—to be such a brute."

He leans across and pats the knee of the uninjured leg of his companion, an affectionate impulse strange to behold in one of his muscular and manly appearance, and which evidences, one would say, a very tender heart. He has not been thoughtless in his acts, in spite of that little verbal slip, for he has not only seen to everything, but taken as much care to make the other comfortable, as though he were a sick child. If he shewed impatience about the train, he shews it now in a much greater degree with himself, twisting threads of his silken beard as though he would tear them out, and looking volumes of penitence out of his large soft brown eyes. "What an idiot I am," he mutters: "a man that would say things like that" (he is referring to his malapropos observation) "would say *anything*, and steal the coppers from a blind man's tray."

His companion, quite unconscious of these ejaculations, is gazing out of window, watching the platform as it fills with its hurrying throng: a photographer would have an excellent chance of taking him, so intent is his expression of interest, and this is the portrait that would result. A lean, dark face, with well-formed, and what is called speaking features; the mouth hard when in rest, but capable of much expression, and improved rather than otherwise by its delicate black moustache; the eyes large and lustrous, but without the softness that is the characteristic of his friend's; the nose aquiline, the forehead high: altogether a very handsome face, nor marred—to the female eye at least—by a certain haughtiness of aspect. When we add (for so far does he lean out of the window that we get a "quarter-length" of him) that his left arm lies in a sling, it is clear that he must needs present an image as dangerous to woman's heart as he did but a few months back to England's foes, when, with that reckless few, he flew across the cannon-swept plain of Balaklava, and sabred the Russians at their guns.

"By Jupiter, there she is!" cried he excitedly, and beckoning with eager joy to some one in the passing throng.

"What!" exclaims his companion, in a tone of astonishment; "surely not you!"—

"Yes, it's Lotty," interrupts the other, in a tone which has triumph in it as well as pleasure. "You don't know what a trump she is. I thought my letter would 'fetch' her. Why, my darling, this is kind."

These last words were addressed to a young girl of singular beauty, who had hurried up, at his signal to the carriage-door, tall and well shaped, with a head crowned by bright brown hair, "a love of a bonnet," with delicate blonde features, that speak of gentle tendance and refinement, and with her air and attire breathing of luxury and the power that belongs to wealth. The expression of this young woman's face, as she caught sight of the wounded soldier, was (when we consider these attributes) a marvel to behold. If she had been a slave, and he a prince, nay, if she had been a Russian serf and he the Czar, her king and priest in one, it could not have expressed a more devoted and submissive admiration. An instant before, she had been moving with stately dignity, and that consciousness of superiority to those about her, consciousness of having more of style, that is, and being better dressed—of which women are so demonstrative, and now—having suddenly darted through the crowd like a boy after a dropped apple—she is standing by the carriage-door, flushed, palpitating, and speechless, with her right hand clasped in his, as though defying steam-power itself to part them.

"This is *very, very* good of you," continued the captain tenderly.

"Good of me, Reggie? why, when you wrote"—Then she stopped, and the flush mounted to her brow, as she saw for the first time that she and her lover were not alone.

"That's only Litton, my dear," explained the captain assuringly; "you've often heard me speak of Walter Litton."

"O yes, indeed," said she, with a sweet smile, as she disengaged her hand from Selwyn's grasp, and offered it to his friend: "his name is very familiar to me—and welcome."

It was now Mr. Litton's turn to blush, and he did so very thoroughly. He had by no means so much confidence in his own merits—perhaps he had none, as he had certainly no wounded arm to shew in proof of them—as his companion: in his eyes, every woman was hedged about with a certain divinity; and one so beautiful and winning as this sweet-voiced girl, he thought he had never beheld before. He was a painter, not only by profession, but by natural calling, and beauty, whether in face or landscape, had a marvellous charm for him. Moreover, as this face flashed upon him, it had begotten the thought:

"If I were a favourite of Fortune, instead of a penniless painter, and might make bold to ask her for the highest bliss she could bestow on mortal, I would ask her for this woman to be my wife." The wish died in its birth, for he instantly remembered that her love was plighted to his friend; but for all that, his soul was lost in glamour, his ready tongue was for the moment bewitched, when she made him that gracious speech.

"Walter is modest, and you overcome him," said the captain pleasantly. Then he whispered in her bent-down ear: "How I wish, my darling, you were coming with me to-day, instead of bidding me good-bye for Heaven knows how long."

"Ah, how I wish I were!" was the hushed response, and the tears rushed to her eyes.

In the silence that followed, the harsh platform bell began to knell, and the warning voice: "All take your seats for the south," rang hoarsely out. "To have seen me but for these fleeting moments is scarce worth the pain, Lotty."

"O yes, it is well worth it," answered she, no longer able to prevent the pearly tears falling one by one down her now pale cheeks. "It is something to think of afterwards."

"Look here!" cried the captain eagerly: "why not come with us as far as Reading; you will just catch the up-express there, and be back in town before six. None but Lilian need ever know."

A look of troubled joy came into her face. "How nice that would be," murmured she; "but then——"

"Now, miss, you must please stand back," said the platform guard; "the train is moving."

"This lady is coming with us," exclaimed the captain quickly; and before a word of remonstrance could pass her lips, the door was opened, the official handed her deftly in, and the train glided softly past the lingering crowd of those who had come to say "good-bye," and to which she herself had a moment before belonged.

"O Reggie," exclaimed the girl in frightened accents, as the train steamed out of the station, and the full consciousness of her audacity smote upon her for the first time. "And it's a smoking-carriage too!"

"Not now," said Walter Litton, smiling, as he emptied out of the window the pipe which he had held concealed in his hand from the moment of her appearance.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said she earnestly. "I don't at all object to smoking; I rather like it."

"You mean you like to see others smoke," observed the captain, laughing. "Well, you shall see *me*. Litton had only a pipe—the contents of which were, moreover, almost exhausted—but it really would be a sacrifice to throw away a cigar like this."

"You're a naughty, selfish man," said Lotty, with such a loving stress upon each adjective, that you might have imagined she was eulogising the dead.

"My dear, the doctors recommend it," answered the captain mildly; "all our men that have been badly hit—unless they were shot through the jaw—were enjoined to smoke the best tobacco, and very often."

"Poor fellows!" ejaculated Lotty pityingly. "I am sure they deserve the best of everything."

"One of them has *got* the best of everything," whispered the captain—"at least so far as Reading."

Lotty sighed.

"I believe I was very wrong to come, Reggie; the people stared so at me as we came out of the station. What *must* they have thought!"

"The people always do stare," was the contemptuous rejoinder; "but I never heard of their thinking."

"But I am afraid it *was* wrong," persisted she, "and that everybody must think so. Don't you think, Mr. Litton, it was a wrong thing to do?"

This was rather a poser; for Walter Litton *did* think it was so; as wrong a thing, that is, as so exquisite a being as Lotty was capable of; that is to say, he thought it injudicious, rash, and a little "fast;" a thing which, if he had been in his friend's position, he would certainly not have permitted, far less have invited and pressed a young lady to do. In his own mind, he blamed the captain very much, but he was not so bold as to say so; he felt that that would be much more dangerous than to blame Lotty herself.

"There can be no harm in it whatever," answered he, "if, as Selwyn says, the up-express can be caught so conveniently at Reading. Our train stops nowhere else, so we cannot be intruded upon by strangers; otherwise, that would certainly be

embarrassing. As it is, you go back to town in the ladies' carriage, and no one need be any the wiser."

There was no very high morality in this speech of Walter Litton's, it must be owned ; but let the reader (male) put himself in his place ; he could not call her " a bold creature," and prophesy that harm would come of it—like a woman.

No more questions of conscience were put for his decision, and he hid himself at once behind the broad sheet of his newspaper, and left the lovers to themselves. It was a somewhat wearisome situation for one with so delicate a sense of what was due to his fellow-creatures ; for when he had read one sheet, he had still to keep it up before him, for the sake of appearances, or rather in order to ignore them. He did not dare turn the paper over : " the liberty of the press " was denied to him. An accidental glance had shewn his two companions in such very earnest converse, that their lips seemed inclined to touch. He could not well cry " Ahem, ahem ! " before removing the obstacle between them and him ; and so he remained in durance. Stone walls, however, do not a prison make, and much less those of paper ; his thought was free, though always within honest bounds of license. He thought no more of Lotty as of one with whom he had fallen in love at first sight, but as of a sister who had become betrothed to his friend ; and of her future. She was, he knew, the daughter of some wealthy " self-made " man—Brown by name, and something, he did not know what, by *trade*—and that her father was set determinately against the match. If he himself had been in Brown's place, he might (he owned) have been of the same opinion ; not because his friend was poor (which was the obstacle in this case, Selwyn had told him), but because he did not think him likely to make a good husband. He was a good friend—or at least Litton had always persuaded himself so—genial, witty, bold, an excellent companion, and a man who had been a general favourite at college. Yet it was said of him, that if a room, no matter how many were its occupants beside himself, had but one arm-chair in it, Selwyn was sure to get it.

Now, in a friend, this might be overlooked ; indeed, it was so in Selwyn's case. His friends, and Litton least of all, did not grudge him the arm-chair, though he always got it ; but in a husband this was not a promising trait. It was unpleasant

to reflect on it. Half an hour before, Walter would have been ashamed to have found himself dwelling on "dear old Selwyn's" little weaknesses ; but that was before he had seen Lotty, his *sister* (you see), as he was supposing her ; and, without doubt, Selwyn had behaved very selfishly in getting her to come to Reading. There were risks in it—none to him, but all to her—such as he should not have allowed her to run, and which, as her brother, he (Litton) resented. Suppose she were to miss the up-train, or her absence were discovered at home, or some acquaintance were to recognise her as she left the carriage at Reading. Any one of these unpleasant accidents might happen, and the consequences to her might be very serious. There was no knowing what a "self-made" man (probably intensely "respectable") might do, on hearing of such an escapade in a member of his family ; it might be even the cause of an estrangement between them, though that, indeed, would be likely to throw her into her lover's arms, which was the very thing, perhaps, by-the-bye, that Selwyn —

"That is a pretty plan to impute to your old friend," here interpolated the voice of Conscience. "Why, if this girl had not been so uncommonly good-looking, and taken your precious 'artistic' fancy, Master Walter Litton, you would never have attained this lofty elevation of ideas : you might have gone up a little way, I don't deny, but not so high as all this. Moreover, it is a sheer assumption that anything like an elopement was contemplated. How could Reginald Selwyn know that this young lady would come to the platform to see him off to Cornwall ? The whole affair was evidently the work of a moment ; and yet you were about to attribute a design—and a very mean one—to the lad who, when you were schoolboys together, had often stood between you and harm, and used his three years of seniority, and the superior strength that went with them, to your advantage and succour ; to your old chum at college ; to the man who went down into the Valley of Death among those heroic Six Hundred, and whose wounds should be mouths to speak for him to the heart of every fellow-countryman. For shame, Master Walter !"

Something like this did really pass through the young painter's mind, and covered him with self-reproach ; and all this time the two objects of his thoughts were sitting hand in hand im-

mediately opposite to him, billing and cooing, but unseen, and almost unheard. All that he knew, and could not help knowing, was, that Selwyn was pleading earnestly for something or other—advocating some injudicious and rash course of conduct, as was only too likely—and that Lotty was objecting to it, if those gentle tones of remonstrance could be called objecting.

At last, as the train shot through a station, with a whir, like the rising of some enormous pheasant, the captain observed aloud : “ Why, that’s Twyford, isn’t it ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Litton : “ the next station, I believe, is Reading.”

He took up his *Bradshaw* to see whether this was the case ; but hardly had he begun to peruse it before he uttered an exclamation of horror : “ Look here ; Selwyn, you are quite wrong about the up-express: it does not start from Reading for the next two hours.”

“ Are you sure, my dear fellow ? Let’s look.—Well, that’s exceedingly inconvenient. I can’t imagine how I could have made such a mistake.”

“ The only thing to be done,” said Walter, moved by Lotty’s white and frightened face, “ is for us two to get out also, and keep this young lady company ; our time is no object, or at least, none in comparison with her staying at the station for so long alone——”

“ Oh, I don’t mind *that*,” interrupted Lotty, in terrified tones ; “ but what am I to do about papa ? I shall not be back in London till eight o’clock. He will be certain to find it all out—O dear, O dear ! ”

“ He will be quite certain, Lotty,” said Selwyn, with earnest gravity ; “ and this necessitates the step to which I have been trying to persuade you all along. This mischance may be turned into the happiest stroke of fortune, if you will only take my advice ; and such an opportunity will assuredly never happen again.”

“ O Reggie, but I dare not. Dear papa would never forgive me.”

“ He will not forgive you for coming down with me to Reading and going back again, and will keep a very tight hand on you in future, you may be sure, Lotty ; but he will forgive you if you don’t go back at all, when he finds there is no use in

being in a passion, since the mischief is done, and you have become my wife."

"Your wife!" exclaimed Litton. "You must not do anything rash, Selwyn."

"Rash! no, quite the reverse, my good fellow. This young lady has promised to marry me sooner or later; that has been settled long ago, but her father will not consent to it. He says 'never'; so it is no more disobedient in her to marry me now than it would be ten years hence. By this lucky piece of imprudence, she will have already offended him beyond measure; her life will henceforth be made a burden to her under his roof. She can't possibly get back, you see, without the most tremendous row; and after that, there would be the other row, when we were married. Now, why shouldn't we have the two rows in one, and get it over for good and all! When the knot is once tied, the old gentleman, perceiving it is of no use to anathematise us, is all the more likely to listen to reason."

"But really, Selwyn, this is a most serious step——"

"Of course it is, my dear Litton," interrupted the captain; "it's the most important step in the world just now, but only to two people in it—to her and to me. Lotty is of age, and can judge for herself."

To this speech, so significant in its tone, Walter Litton did not know what to reply. The affair was certainly not his business, nor did any valid objections to Selwyn's arguments occur to him, save one—namely, that the young lady in her present position, separated from those who had the right to give her good advice, and urged by one whom she passionately adored, was not a free agent.

"I don't know what to do for the best," cried Lotty, wringing her hands. "Oh, why was I so foolish as to get into the train!"

"Not foolish, darling, only so fond," whispered the captain. "You acted as your heart dictated, and that is a guide to which it is always safe to trust. So far from regretting your position, you should rejoice that it has placed the happiness within our grasp which sooner or later we had promised ourselves. Life is too short for such procrastination."

"Oh, what will papa say?" sobbed Lotty, uncomfortable by this philosophy, but at the same time obviously giving way to the Inevitable, which in her idea was Captain Reginald Selwyn.

"I can very easily guess, my darling," said he, smiling. "There will be an eruption of the volcano; burning lava—some very strong language indeed—will stream forth in every direction, and overwhelm the solid Duncombe and his myrmidons. Then after a while there will be silence and calm. The crater will cease to agitate itself; 'What's done can't be undone,' it will sigh, and nobody will be a penny the worse."

"A penny the worse," reiterated Litton softly: "is it possible he is calculating upon getting money with her?" All his uncharitable thoughts regarding his friend had gathered strength again; he could not forgive him for taking advantage of this girl's love and isolation.

"What will Lily say?" sobbed Lotty, after a long pause, during which the whistle sounded shrilly, to proclaim their approach to the station.

"She will say how lucky dear Lotty is to have married the man of her choice. Shall I ever have the like good fortune? And, in the meantime, being the kindest-hearted girl (save one) in the whole world, she will employ herself in effecting a reconciliation between your father and ourselves. Come, darling, the time is come for your final decision; be firm, be courageous——"

"Selwyn," interrupted Litton abruptly, "there is one thing that has been forgotten: with whom is this young lady to reside until you can procure a marriage-license? Have you any female relative in Cornwall who can receive her? Otherwise, the whole plan must needs fall to the ground; that is positively certain."

"You are as right as the Bank," said the captain admiringly. "What a stickler you are for the proprieties; if it was not for your beard, you would make a most excellent chaperon! Why, of course, I have thought of a home for Lotty until she shall be mine. My aunt Sheldon lives at Penaddon—that is only a few miles from Falmouth, for which we are bound, and quite as pretty; you will fill your portfolio there just as well——"

"Never mind *me*," interrupted Litton impatiently. "Good Heavens! as if anything signified except *this*. But are you sure of her getting a kind reception, a welcome!"

"Yes, quite sure," answered the captain decisively. "Mrs. Sheldon will do anything for me. We shall be married from her house in the orthodox manner; it will be scarcely an elopement at all. See, here we are at Reading; and to think that my own darling is not going to leave me, neither now nor ever!"

"O dear! O dear! what will poor Lily say?" murmured Lotty, nestling, however, close to her Reginald, and evidently quite resolved to stay there.

"Can we not telegraph to her?" inquired Litton eagerly.

"What! and tell her where we have gone?" cried the captain. "That would be madness indeed."

"No, no; I mean to relieve her mind; to let her know that her sister is safe and well. Otherwise, they will think she has come to harm."

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Litton," answered Lotty gratefully; "I should never have thought of that."

"Litton thinks of everything," said the captain laughing; "he ought to be a courier to a large family travelling on the continent, but seriously it is an excellent thought; and as I am a cripple, and I daresay Lotty would find her pretty hand shake a bit under existing circumstances, you shall telegraph for us."

"Yes, but not home, Reginald. Lily will not be at home until five o'clock; and some one else might open it; and no one must tell poor papa, but Lily. She will be at the drawing-class in George Street, you know."

"Quite right. Then this is the telegram," said the captain, dictating. "*From Lotty, Birmingham (that will put them far enough off the scent), to Miss Lilian Brown, Ladies' College, George Street.—I have gone away with R. S. to his aunt's house. Your sister will be married to-morrow. That will prevent the telegraph clerk from taking particular notice, as he would do if he thought we were a runaway couple, and at the same time convince them that all interference will be too late. Say all you can for her to her father. Her dear love to both of you. That you will forgive and not forget her, is her prayer. Farewell.* There is a deal more than the twenty words there, but sentiment is always expensive."

The message had been written while the train was slackening speed, and now they had reached the platform.

Litton sprang out at once upon his mission, which he had but just time to accomplish, ere the engine began to snort again.

"Some fellows wanted to get in here while you were away," observed the captain, on his return to the carriage; "so I've got the guard to stick an *engaged* board over the window. It combines utility and truth, you see, for it keeps us private, and exactly describes the mutual relation of Lotty and myself.—Don't it, Lotty?"

The captain had been mentioned in despatches for his coolness.

CHAPTER II.

THE DAUNTLESS THREE.

"**W**HERE is Penaddon?" asked Litton, when the train was once more on its way. "I mean, how far is it from Falmouth?"

"Oh, well, a good step: when I said a few miles, I rather underrated the distance. I should think it was twenty miles. It is on the south coast of Cornwall, near the Lizard."

"Then there is no railway," observed the other curiously.

"No; but it is a goodish road, though hilly; and with four horses we shall spin along in a couple of hours."

"Is it a telegraph station?"

"Yes, there's a telegraph; but we can't go by *that*," said the captain sharply.

"No; but you can send word to your aunt that you are coming. That you must certainly do, Selwyn, for, with an hour's stay at Plymouth for dinner, we shall not arrive at our journey's end at earliest before one in the morning; and it will, of course, be necessary to make preparations for your reception."

"Our chaperon is always right, Lotty; he shall telegraph at Swindon," said the captain comfortingly, for the news that they were to be so long on their way seemed to have come on the poor girl quite unexpectedly, and once more she had dissolved in tears. "You must tell my aunt the state of the case, Litton; ask her to take charge of Lotty, and also to secure a couple of rooms for you and me at the little inn. It's just the place for a painter—covered all over with the blossoms of a great what-you-may-call-it—a westeria—the branches of which keep it from tumbling to pieces, and looking on to the old castle."

"I hope there are not many people at Penaddon. It is not a gay place, is it, Reginald?" asked Lotty, tearfully.

"Gay! No, my darling," replied the captain laughing. "My Aunt Sheldon complains that she is buried alive there. There is not a soul to speak to within five miles."

"I thought you said there was a castle."

"Yes; but it has no roof to it. It is a Roman ruin. Even the church has fallen to pieces, and half of it into the sea. There is another church, however, built judiciously more inland, in which marriage services are no doubt performed upon occasion."

"What will your aunt think of my coming down like this, Reggie?"

"What will papa think? What will Lily think? What will your aunt think?" mimicked the captain. "Why, my dear Lotty, you seem bent on collecting the thoughts of all the family. As for Aunt Sheldon, I promise you she will think no worse of you for this little escapade, but rather the better, for she made a runaway match of it herself—and not so very long ago neither."

Here Litton looked up quickly; his friend's eyes were fixed on Lotty, but the captain's foot came in significant contact with his own, and gave it a warning pressure.

"There is something wrong about Selwyn's aunt," thought Walter. "Sheldon, Sheldon! surely I have heard that name before;" and presently he remembered where he *had* heard it. Mrs. Sheldon might have made a runaway match, but that was not the incident in her married life which occurred to his memory. He recollected her name as having appeared in the Divorce Court in connection with a "judicial separation." She had applied for it herself and obtained it; but still there had been circumstances he did not remember what, but which had made an impression on him not to her advantage. She was not the sort of woman at all events to whose house to bring a young girl whose conduct required an advocate who should herself be above the suspicion of a stain. It was too late, however, to make any objections now, even if one could ever have been made on such a ground. Sixty miles were already put between Lotty and her home; an hour and a half had elapsed which had placed her old life and her new irrevocably apart. A less time suffices to do as much for many of us. A word spoken in the heat of hate; a look given—nay, suffered to

escape—in the ardour of love, is often a Good-bye to all our Past, and on its ruins Life begins once more.

From Swindon, "the chaperon," as the captain had christened Walter, and as Lotty herself now also termed him (for she was fast recovering from her apprehensions and anxieties), Litton telegraphed to Penaddon, and, when they reached Exeter, to Falmouth also, to order the carriage and posters to meet them at the station, that not a moment should be lost. He did not tell his companions of his having taken this latter precaution, since it would only have aroused the captain's mirth; but, to Walter, everything that seemed likely to conduce to Lotty's comfort was of importance, and he was quite content to do her service without acknowledgment. It was he, of course, since his friend was incapacitated by reason of his honourable wounds, who procured Lotty her railway ticket, provided them with refreshments, and ordered their dinner at the inn at Plymouth. In fact, as Reginald subsequently observed, it was Walter who did the "billing," and he the "cooing" throughout that journey. The former duty required no little adroitness to avert public attention from Lotty, for, despite all that has been done for the independence of the sex, it is still unusual for a young lady to travel with two young gentlemen, neither of whom are related to her, in an "engaged" smoking-carriage. The interest of the passengers, who had somehow or other become cognisant of this social anomaly in their midst, was greatly excited by it, and most of them, as they got out at their various destinations, would stroll up the platform to steal a look at "the dauntless three," as the captain himself styled themselves. On these occasions, not only did Walter confront the intruders with indignant countenance, and every hair in his beard bristling defiance at one side-window, but he built up on the other an eidolon, made of his own and the captain's surplus travelling gear, to obscure the view. At Plymouth, too, he preceded them to the inn, and bespoke a private room for the little party, whereby he obtained a fleeting reputation of being Lotty's husband. The waiter's powers of observation were not so keen as those of the chambermaid, who remarked at once that Lotty wore no wedding-ring, and built up a little romance upon the circumstance, the heroine of which (as often happens in romances) was, I am sorry to say, no better than she should be.

Whether anything of this was guessed by Lotty, or that she had been made to feel in any other way the embarrassment of her position, it is certain, that so far from being invigorated by her meal, her spirits had deserted her when she entered the train again ; and as dusk came on, the doubt of a welcome from Mrs. Sheldon, and the certainty of the unhappiness that she had by this time inflicted on those at home, oppressed her mind in spite of her Reginald's efforts to enliven the way.

"Stare, my darling, of course the people stare," he would explain in mitigation of her discomfort ; "but it is only with admiration. They see a Crimean hero and his sister—that is, a Sister of Mercy in attendance upon him—also a young surgeon rising fast in reputation, but who has sacrificed his professional prospects for the time, in order to accompany his friend to a warmer climate. It is quite an idyll of Hospital life." As for the perturbation produced in the Brown family, the gallant captain was sublimely indifferent to it ; and with respect to the reception they were likely to get at Penaddon, his knowledge of his aunt's character, and of her liking for himself, perhaps made him confident of a welcome. At all events, his stoicism only once broke down, which happened on their arrival at Falmouth, where, in addition to the carriage-and-four bespoken by Litton, they found a considerable crowd attracted by that phenomenon.

"Well, I must say you have advertised us pretty completely," was Reginald's only acknowledgment of his friend's forethought. And certainly remarks of the bystanders were of a nature calculated to irritate an invalid. That the four horses were ordered for an elopement, the natives, it seemed, had made up their minds, and from that stand-point not even the presence of a third person could move them. They only adapted their old theory (as men will) to suit the unexpected fact, and exclaimed admiringly, "Why, if she aint a running with two of 'em !"

The rest of the journey was melancholy indeed ; for, however pleasant Dr. Johnson may have found it in his time to travel by post, he had no experience of what it is after one has already come some three hundred miles by railway ; it rained unceasingly, too, for the first hour, so that, though the moon was at her full, there was little to be seen from the windows

of the carriage, and when it grew clear the country was no longer picturesque. They had no more, it is true, to toil like Sisyphus up one hill-side only to descend another, but their way lay over bleak and barren moors, swept by a wind that seemed resolute to oppose their passage, and in whose hiss and moan poor Lotty, though her hand was clasped in Reginald's, heard many a warning and remonstrant voice. At last there fell upon their ears that sound, which has no other like to it in nature, the roaring of an angry sea ; and the captain let down the window, and bade Lotty look out. Around them and before them, for they were on a high-set promontory, spread the moonlit sea, wild and white with wrath as far as eye could reach, and beneath them a spectral ruin.

"That is Penaddon Castle, Lotty, in which, as you may observe for yourself, no county family resides at present. The light down yonder is from the Hall, which shews that hospitable preparation has been made for your reception. The scene looks a little ghastly by this light ; but, to-morrow, you will own that you never saw a prettier place, or one, I hope, in which you were so happy ;" and, utterly ignoring Walter's presence, who knew not where to look, he kissed her.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARRIVAL.

THE carriage here began rapidly to descend, and passing under a gateway, and through a wilderness of shrubs and laurels, drew up before a flight of stone steps.

Litton knew, of course, that they had stopped at the front-door of the Hall, and was all anxiety to note how his companions were received. His quick eye had observed, even in that uncertain light, that the gateway was not only old, but crumbling to its fall; that the shrubbery shewed no tokens of the gardener's care; and that the steps were chipped and broken. The whole place was evidently poverty-stricken; but it was not poverty—just then—that he feared upon Lotty's account. He was anxious to see what sort of guardian Selwyn had provided for her in his aunt. The door opened, and an old man-servant appeared, and came slowly down the steps, at the top of which, with a lamp in her hand, stood a tall dark woman, gazing at them intently.

"That's my aunt," whispered the captain, jumping out and running up to her. She did not move towards him a hair-breadth, nor even hold out her hand. Then a question and answer were, as it seemed, rapidly exchanged—and, to Walter's extreme relief, a smile broke out upon the hostess's face, and she came swiftly down to the carriage-door. She was only just in time, for poor Lotty, in an agony of grief and shame, had almost fainted away: it had seemed to her that Mrs Sheldon was about to refuse her admittance.

"What a journey you have had, my dear, and how tired you must be!" were that lady's first words, uttered in a sweet and sympathetic, though, as it seemed to Walter, a somewhat affected tone. "However, you have reached home at last."

She held out her arms, gracefully, almost theatrically, in welcome, and Lotty fairly threw herself into them, and burst into tears. She had not known till then how much, how very much, she stood in need of womanly countenance and succour.

"Welcome to Penaddon, my dear," said Mrs. Sheldon, this time, as it seemed, with genuine tenderness.—"And welcome to you, sir," added she, to Walter, extending to him graciously her unoccupied hand. The *pose* of her tall, well-rounded figure was magnificent, nor did she seem at all embarrassed by the weeping girl who hung upon her shoulder.—"Who is this gentleman, Reginald? You have not introduced us," said she, pointing to Walter.

"Oh, it's only our courier."

"Your *courier*!" exclaimed Mrs. Sheldon indignantly.

"Yes; our courier, our chaperon, our gooseberry-picker, our all.—Is he not, Lotty?—Mr. Walter Litton."

Even Lotty could not refrain from laughing—though, truth to say, it was in a half-hysterical way; and Mrs. Sheldon, not uninfluenced, perhaps, by Walter's comely looks, took her nephew's mischievous joke in high good-humour. As she led the way from the hall into the dining-room, with Lotty on her arm, Walter could not help remarking how like aunt and nephew were: the lean fine-featured face, the bright but somewhat unsympathetic eyes, the hard yet mobile mouth, were common to both; and if the woman was not so handsome for a woman as the man was for a man, it was only because time had laid its inexorable finger on the former's charms. She was still young—that is, for a married woman—not more than five-and-thirty at the most; but there were lines about her face which spoke of trouble past and present; and now and again her mouth would shape itself, as it seemed unconsciously, into a painful smile.

Her manners were perfect, however, and the tact with which she ignored the embarrassing position in which all were placed, was worthy of Talleyrand.

"I have provided nothing, Reginald, but tea and coffee and cold chicken," said she, pointing to the table, which was laid for supper, "because I knew that this dear girl of yours would have no relish for a heavier meal. What she wants more than anything else are rest and quiet; and as for you two gentlemen, you will find fare more suited to your taste at the inn. You will think me very inhospitable, I fear, Mr. Litton, but——"

"I think you very wise, madam," interrupted Walter earnestly. "In my opinion, Selwyn and myself ought to be off to our quarters at once. We must have kept up the good people at the inn already long past their usual time."

"O bother the good people at the inn!" said the captain disdainfully, as he helped Lotty to a cup of tea.

"Yes; and that is just what you *will* do, Reginald, if you don't get there till two o'clock in the morning," rejoined his hostess. "Moreover, the later you arrive, the greater will be their surprise, and the more they'll talk about the matter; and for the present, it is just as well that they should not talk about it. I have sent my own maid to bed, lest the spectacle of a young lady's advent without so much as a hand-bag in the way of luggage, should stimulate her curiosity. The idea"—here she turned to Lotty—"of your travelling about the country, my dear, with two portmanteaus warranted solid leather, and a couple of hat-boxes, is something too ridiculous. —You can't touch a bit, you think? Well, of course, you can't, while this veteran from the wars, of whom you must have got thoroughly tired by this time, stands sentry over you in that way.—Come, sir; you are an invalid yourself, and must not keep late hours. Bid her good-night, and be off to your inn."

Reginald said his "good-bye" to Lotty accordingly—a very decorous one, and then Walter offered his hand.

"I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Litton," said she softly. The words, and still more the tone, thrilled through him with a strange pain. How beautiful she looked, and yet how pitiful; far from her home and all, save one, that loved her. No; there was a second person, who did not indeed love her, because she was plighted to another, but who had devoted himself heart and soul to her interest; one whom her very sighs had troubled, and whom her tears had smitten like drops of molten lead. Would it ever be *his* future, he wondered, to be loved, as his friend was, and by such a paragon? No, alas; for there could be no two Lotties in the world.

"Good-night, Mr. Courier." It was his hostess who was addressing him for the second time, and with that pinched smile about her lips which is the outward sign of woman's cynicism. "Why, you seem to take parting from your charge

almost as much to heart as Reginald himself. I feel as if I were the angel commissioned to turn you both out of Paradise."

"You *look* like the angel," observed the captain gallantly, "and I leave my Lotty with confidence under your fostering wings. Good-night."

"Good-night, irreverent boy ; and remember, we do not receive company to-morrow morning before eleven o'clock, at earliest. This poor child is utterly done up," she added in a whisper : "girls took to elopements in my time very differently."

"Like ducklings to water, eh !" laughed the captain.

"Go away, sir ; for shame ! Good-night, Mr. Courier."

"I tell you what, Litton," said Selwyn, when they had re-entered the carriage, and it was moving rapidly towards the inn ; "you've regularly 'fetched' Aunt Sheldon."

"Fetched your aunt Sheldon ?"

"Yes, made a conquest of her, man, I mean. If you had not been with us, I doubt if she would have been half as civil."

"Upon my life, Selwyn, I thought she was not going to be civil at all, when you first spoke to her on the steps. What cake did you throw to Kerberus that made things at once so pleasant ? She knew you had eloped, of course ?"

"Yes ; but she didn't know with whom."

"But you couldn't have explained everything in that quarter of a minute—who the young lady was, and all that ?"

"Oh, she knew about Lotty well enough ; but she was not certain that it *was* Lotty."

"But who else *could* it have been !" inquired Walter, aghast.

"I am sure I don't know," laughed the captain ; "nor more did she. That was her little difficulty. She never would have countenanced the affair, you see, unless she had approved of my choice, for material reasons. She has a very sharp eye to the main chance—has Aunt Sheldon. By-the-bye, I never call her aunt, nor must you hint at my being her nephew. Her little weakness is to belong to the rising generation, not to the elder one. And, indeed, there are not so many years between us, though she is scarcely in her *première jeunesse*."

Litton remained silent ; he was stricken dumb by the thought of the risk that Lotty's reputation had incurred ; of the chance however small, that had existed of her finding the doors of

Penaddon Hall closed against her. From one point of view, indeed, now that all had turned out right, this was satisfactory, since it shewed that Mrs. Sheldon did draw the line of propriety somewhere. But what a hard and fast line it was! What misery and disgrace might have resulted from this woman's "No!" And she looked quite capable of saying "No" upon occasion, and of sticking to it. That hint about "material reasons" too, jarred upon the young painter's ear. It was evident that Lotty's expectations—the fact, that is, of her being a rich man's daughter—were known of old to Mrs. Sheldon; had probably been debated between herself and Selwyn; and again the suspicion, he had more than once entertained that day, flashed on him, that the whole affair in which he had himself played so prominent though involuntary a part, was not the result of a momentary impulse, as it appeared to be, but was designed by the captain from the first. And yet, that could hardly have been, unless Lotty had been a party to it; and Walter could never, never believe *that*. It was impossible that that touching conflict between Love and Duty, of which he had been a witness, that maidenly hesitation, those regretful tears, could have been *acted* by any girl; and above all, it was impossible—he would stake his life upon it—that this particular one could have stooped to such deception. Lotty was simplicity itself, and but that her tenderness for her lover outweighed all other considerations, the very last girl in the world to have made what the vulgar call a runaway match. How shocking, how cruel, would be the verdict passed even now upon this sweet innocent creature, for that indiscretion; and once more he shuddered to think of what it would have been had Mrs. Sheldon refused her countenance to her. He felt as though he could have laid down his life, if that might have shielded her from the breath of evil report, for those gracious words of parting still rang in his tingling ears; "I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Litton," seemed to have paid him, as it were, in advance, for any sacrifice.

Oh, great and wonderful is the power of woman's beauty over the heart of man! Old or young, married or single—for though it blooms not for ourselves, it is still passing sweet—we all alike acknowledge its sway. Man has no social gift to compare with it; for man's comeliness is not in woman's eyes, what

woman's comeliness is in man's. A young girl who is beautiful is a princess, to whom the knee of every male is bowed in allegiance, either openly or in secret ; and those who affect to be indifferent to her, are often her most abject slaves. It is but skin deep, this beauty, we are told ; but what more is majesty ? It must fail and fade—that is also true, alas—but while it lasts no matter though it be in the humblest, what potentialities—what possibilities abide in it ! Think of that, my friends, when you are about to sneer at her in whom it is fading : who feels the power she once wielded slipping from her passionate clutch, who cries with Arthur, " Authority deserts the dying king," and yet who must needs live, and behold others usurp her place ; think, I say, of the wretchedness of the woman who has staked all upon those fading charms, and has lost, since she has failed to win, and pity her.

" Here is the *Wheatsheaf* at last," exclaimed Selwyn, as the carriage stopped, " Did you ever see such a jolly inn ? " To the adjective " jolly " the captain was wont to describe anything that was good of its kind—a jolly girl, a jolly row, a jolly lobster—but in this particular case he used it in an artistic sense.

The *Wheatsheaf* was undeniably picturesque. So entirely had the plant of which he had spoken taken possession of the whole edifice with its spreading branches, that it looked more like a house in a tree, than a dwelling overgrown with vegetation. The purple blossoms, that covered it as thickly as peaches grow on a sunny wall, had a beautiful though weird effect in the moonlight ; and so protected was the nook in which the little inn was situated, that not a blossom stirred, though the wind could be heard still roaring in the moor above, almost as fiercely as the waves beat upon the neighbouring shore. The house stood with its back to the spot upon which frowned the old Roman ruin, gaunt and straggling ; and to the left of it, at a slightly lower level, was dimly seen another edifice, also in decay—the church which had succumbed to the encroaching sea.

The visitors were ushered to their apartments—small and plainly furnished rooms enough, but of exquisite cleanliness—and presently came down to supper, for which they by no means manifested the disrelish which their fair companion had

shewn. When the table had been cleared, and the waiter dismissed to his long-wished-for bed, the two young men sat over their tobacco—the captain, as before, smoking his cigar, the painter his pipe—and discussed the day's events, with which the former expressed himself as more than satisfied.

"If my dear Lotty has a fault," said he, complacently, "it is indecision, and it is most fortunate that circumstances have thus decided *for* her. In a few days we shall be married; and even as it is, matters have gone too far, thank goodness, for any interference of her family with her happiness. If 'Napoleon in person,' as the war histories magnificently put it, should descend upon us—if old Brown himself should come to Penadon, she would now become Mrs. Selwyn in despite of him. This is very tolerable sherry to find at such an *Ultima Thule*. Let us drink the old curmudgeon's health, and a speedy reconciliation with his offspring."

"By all means, my dear Selwyn," said Walter, filling his glass. "But suppose he refuses to be reconciled, and disinherits her?"

"Let us hope better things," answered the captain.

"I do hope them, most sincerely, most warmly, my dear fellow; but one must not shut one's eyes to what may happen, merely because it is very unpleasant. It is much better to look the worst in the face—while there is yet time to avert the worst."

"I don't understand you, Litton," said the captain, speaking with the unnecessary distinctness which suggests that particular state of mind which ladies call "temper." "I am sure you do not intend to imply that there is a possibility of my retracing this step. If I were inclined to think of such a thing on my own account—to sacrifice, that is, my own happiness to this old man's will, to forego the advantage I have gained, and once more put myself in the position of a suppliant to him—I say, if I were inclined to humiliate myself to that extent (which is not to be thought of), still, it is wholly out of the question that Lotty can return to her home, after what has taken place to-day, unless as my wife."

"But can you maintain her as your wife—that is, as your wife ought to be maintained, my good fellow? We are very old friends, you and I, Reginald: you cannot imagine that I

have anything but your own interest, and that of your destined bride's, at heart. I know your circumstances. The question is : How are you to live ? ”

“ That is *our* look-out—or at least mine, my good friend. And, at all events, the question—though I grant it is a pertinent one—comes a little late.”

“ That is true, Selwyn. All that I meant was, would it not be easier to conciliate your future father-in-law before you have absolutely set him at defiance ? His daughter is at your aunt's house—the match is so far countenanced by your family : is not that a vantage-ground from which you could treat with this old gentleman with a better grace, than after having utterly cast off his authority ? Consider, too, with how much lighter a heart, with what an infinite increase of happiness, the girl of your choice would go to the altar, could this cloud of parental displeasure be dispelled beforehand ? ”

“ No, Litton,” returned the other positively ; “ you don't know this old fellow as I do. He is as hard as nails, where he *can* be hard ; but he has sufficient common-sense, I think, to make the best of a bad job—which is the term he will no doubt apply to my becoming his son-in-law. I shall be able to make a better bargain with him when I possess that *locus standi*, and I mean to have it. Of course, the present position is very unpleasant for us all round. People will say hard things even of yourself, to whose friendly help we are both so much indebted, for having ‘ aided and abetted ’ this young lady to leave the paternal roof. You will be like the second in a duel, who gets all the odium, and none of the glory.”

“ Oh, never mind *me*,” said Walter impatiently. “ I was thinking of somebody else. I was thinking,” added he hastily, his face growing crimson as he spoke one of the few falsehoods his lips had ever uttered, “ of your aunt, who will certainly come in for her share of discredit.”

“ Oh, never mind my aunt,” returned the captain contemptuously. “ Beatty Sheldon (her name is Beatrice) is not unaccustomed to the censure of society, and cares about it as little as any one I know. She is a real good plucked one, whatever her faults, and not likely to give way to clamour. By Jove, I wish we had her at the Horse Guards, instead of some other old women I could mention.”

Walter sighed, and took up his bed-candle ; there was nothing more to be said, he knew. Whatever slender hope he might have entertained of inducing his friend to make an effort, even now, to gain his intended father-in-law's consent to his marriage, and therewith some provision, however small, for Lotty's future, had utterly died away. What Selwyn had hinted, too, of Mrs. Sheldon's past was not calculated to dispel his doubts as to the suitability of that lady for a young girl's chaperon, in the present circumstances. He regretted much that his accidental companionship with the captain had made him an involuntary actor in that day's doings ; but not, as he had truly said, from any apprehension of what the world might say of them or of him : he regretted it because he had seen Lotty—the brightest fairest sight that his eyes had ever lit upon, her face the sweetest his painter's fancy had ever pictured, her voice the tenderest his ears had heard. He regretted it because he had seen Lotty, yet was forbidden by cruel Fate to love her, because she was the betrothed of his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

PENADDON.

IN spite of his long travel of the previous day, Walter Litton was up betimes on the morning after his arrival at Penaddon. Not so the captain, who, since the sight of his destined bride had been forbidden to him till eleven o'clock, thought himself justified in indulging in one of his favourite weaknesses—that of rising late. He was not a man to set a fancy value upon his time under any circumstances, nor had he much appreciation of the beauties of nature, never so charming, fresh, and inspiring as when the day is young. Litton, on the contrary, was ordinarily much impressed by them; and never had a fairer scene awaited him than that which met his eyes when, having unfastened the door of the *Wheatsheaf* with his own hands (for no one in the house was yet stirring but himself), he stood in the roadway, which, at a few paces from the inn, was lost in the shelving sand of the sea-shore. The tiny waves were lapping softly upon it, for the storm of the previous night had spent itself, and the gulls, which it had blown about like foam, were sliding noiselessly through the sunny air. To the north and east lay the illimitable ocean; but southward, the view was interrupted by a small projecting promontory, upon which, and not on the shore, as he had imagined, from his friend's description, stood the ruined church. The sea, indeed, had encroached upon it, and in a manner swallowed it up; but this had been effected by sapping the foundations of the cliff on which it had been built. The Romans, wiser in their generation than those whose devout hands had raised the church, had placed *their* edifice, half-castle, half-camp, upon much higher ground, where it still bade defiance to all assaults, even those of Time itself. The two together offered in their decay as picturesque a spectacle as could well be imagined. A winding road, itself broken and jagged on the side towards the hungry sea, and already unsafe for wheeled conveyances, led up

to the more modern ruin ; but the other stood in a cornfield, approachable only by a narrow path through the standing grain. The uses of the castle, wrapped around in its mantle of ivy, and with many a leafy shrub growing from the interstices of its huge walls, in which the dust of centuries had accumulated, were wholly fled ; the fosse, which had once formed its external defence, was filled with earth ; the watch-tower, on which its sentinels had been posted, was unapproachable, for the steps that had led to it were fallen away ; it needed a scholar even to guess at what had been the design of those massive outlines, which had once sheltered the soldiers of Cæsar. The church, on the contrary, if for fewer folk than of old, kept its uses still. Just as there are men and women, in whom, in youth, there was seen by their contemporaries little to admire above their fellows, but who, when age approaches, are clothed in reverence to the eyes of a later generation, so was this sacred ruin—now that the voices of its preachers were silenced for ever, and the winds of heaven made music in its roofless aisles in place of any mortal choir—far more suggestive of religious thought than it had been in its palmyest time. The long-forgotten dead—those at least whom the sacrilegious sea had not devoured—still lay around it, though the grass that covered them had well nigh lost all semblance to that “swelling turf” which marks the last resting-places of our kind ; their headstones had fallen, or sunk, or disappeared, and with them, in dust and nothingness, lay the hands that out of dear remembrance might have strewn the autumn flowers on their graves ; but Nature had performed this pious duty, and in less transient fashion. The golden furze scattered its perfume over them with every breath of air ; by mossy stones, half-hidden from the eye, the violet scattered its incense, and a thousand little blossoms, yellow, blue, and red, enamelled the green pall that covered all. Even within the church, these innocent intruders had made their way, bordering the broken slabs, beneath which lay nameless knights and squires, embracing the chancel arch with their delicate tendrils, and giving each prostrate pillar a florid capital to replace that which it had lost in its fall.

As Walter climbed the stile that led into this deserted sanctuary, a partridge whirled from beneath his feet, and flew to, wards a neighbouring wood ; his eyes mechanically followed it

and perceived through the trees the glint of a white house, which he rightly conjectured to be Penaddon Hall. In an instant, the church, the castle, and the fair scene which was on all sides spread before him, were forgotten, and his thoughts recurred to the subject from which they had won him, and from which he had been glad to be won—Lotty. He had never called her by that name, of course, but he had heard her called so, and never thought of her under any other. He was not a poet, even in feeling—as, indeed, few painters are ; but he had something more than an eye for natural beauties ; he had a reverent spirit. His first idea, on beholding this sacred solitude, whose silence the noisy exit of the partridge had made even more impressive, could not have been such as would certainly have occurred to his friend Seiwyn : “ What a jolly place for a picnic ! ” The presence of the dead would have hushed his lips. He would have thought with solemnity upon the generations of men whose bones had been buried in that lonely spot, and whose memory had died away. He would have contrasted their position, perhaps, with that of their far-off descendants, living and toiling yonder in the ships at sea, or on the earth that was to know them no more, with pity—for youth and hope were still his own. The kestrel, at all events, whom his coming had disturbed from its eyrie in the ruined castle, and which now hung reassured and motionless, above his head, would for certain have attracted his attention ; but the eye only sees what it brings with it, or, rather, the outward eye is but the deputy of our sense of seeing, and can see nothing save in the absence of its principal, the inward. And Walter's inward eye was fixed on Lotty. He could not have helped it, even though it should have cost him his life, and his thoughts did him no dishonour. How beautiful she was, how gracious, and in what sore need of help and guidance ! These were the three aspects in which she chiefly presented herself to him. He did not resent the fact, that his friend had secured her affections ; he bowed before it, as before any other harsh decree of Destiny ; but he did, without quite acknowledging it to himself, resent in his heart the complacency with which the captain took his good-fortune, and the small store he apparently set by it. It was not exactly that he did not value his prize as it deserved, but that he seemed to value it for what were not its

rarest and most precious attributes, but for such as were common to other girls. It was hateful, for example, to hear him talk of her expectations, and still more hateful to perceive that the difficulties of her position, and the evil consequences that might result from it to herself, were not the only, if even the chief, considerations with Selwyn. He regarded them fully as much, nay, more, as they affected *him*. And if this was the case before he had married her, while those intoxicating charms were not yet his own, at the time when the Chord of Self passes from the Harp of Life even with the most selfish, how would it be when he had become possessed and was tired of them ! And if, with satiety, poverty should also befall this man (as it was like to do), who had always been wont to fare of the best, and valued it, would not Lotty have to endure much worse than poverty—coldness, neglect, and the bitter consciousness that she had been the wilful cause of her own ruin ! Litton was hard upon his friend, no doubt, but it was because his heart was poured out like water in tenderness for this friendless girl ; nor was he selfish in his indignation. If the captain had not existed, he could still not have hoped to make Lotty his own. He had no position in the world, and no money to be called “money ;” that is to say, he had just enough to live upon in a very sparing and Spartan-like manner. His brush had as yet earned him little or nothing, scarce enough to pay for his canvas and the paints, with an occasional share of a model. And though so young, and really clever with his fingers, he did not believe that his genius would give him an independence for many a year to come. His parents had long been dead ; he had been left to the care of a distant relative, who had all but declined the trust bequeathed to him, and had only let him have his way in embracing Art as a profession, because it was less trouble than to oppose him. He had been practically left to his own guidance in London for years, just as much as now that he was legally his own master. To some lads, this would have been ruin ; with most of us—notwithstanding the best of bringing-up—“good principles”—a vague name, but a very real thing—do not actuate our conduct till long after we have passed Litton’s age ; but it had not been so with him. He was no saint, indeed, but he was a man of honour in a fine sense, and a true gentleman. Old age, and womanhood, and poverty, had always

exacted from him respect and pity. He had knocked about in the world (a very different thing from *being* knocked about in it, remember) without losing his tenderness of heart, or honesty, though he had got rid of a good many illusions prevalent among those of his age. If Lotty had been a poor girl of humble birth, and had been free to love him, he would not have hesitated to become a suitor for her hand. He would have thought very little of the opinions of society about that matter ; but in such circumstances as the present he would have thought a good deal of *her*, and would certainly never have persuaded her to give up home, and friends, and competence, to accept him and poverty. He had a habit, rare at any time of life with men, of thinking of others even in the affairs in which he himself was also concerned.

At this moment, however, as he walks up and down the deserted churchyard, gazing mechanically, and not as usual with a keen eye to "effects," at earth, and sea, and sky, his thoughts were mainly of his own position, present and future. How long was he doomed to live in those dreary lodgings in Beech Street, practising his art, while the short light lasted—drawing "studies" that had to be rubbed out again to make room for others, but little better, or painting likenesses of which even the hired sitters did not always express their admiration? Upon the whole, he was afraid he would never "make much of it" in the way of his calling, though he loved it well, and was prone to magnify it upon occasion ; never enough, probably, to have a home of his own, that he could call such, ruled by some dear helpmate and sympathiser. Jack Pelter, who lived on the floor below him, and went halves in his models, was a good fellow enough, it is true, and said "Poor devil" really as if he felt it, when Walter's picture came back from the Gallery in Pall-Mall last month rejected by the committee ; but that was not the sort of consolation for which he yearned. He did not relish the prospect of becoming in time like Jack himself, though that agreeable veteran had plenty of accepted pictures, some of which were even marked with that charming St. Andrew's cross in the catalogues ; red-nosed, hoarse-voiced Jack, given to singing ballads "amatory and bacchanalian," as the old song-books term them, late into the night, and rising in the morning with a relish for beer. Walter was no milksop,

but the prospect of such a future had no charms for him, and yet it seemed the best he had to look to. He had not speculated upon these matters hitherto, being wisely content to work and wait ; but now—now that he had had a glimpse of the What-might-have-been, if everything had been quite different, he had become sadly dissatisfied with his condition. He was not envious of the captain's good fortune, but he could not forbear contrasting it with his own. "When could *he* ever hope to possess—indeed, was it possible that the world held another like her for him or any man—such a paragon of loveliness as this young girl, whom he had seen for the first time but yesterday, but whose charms would never, while memory——"

At this point in his soliloquy, Walter instinctively glanced towards the Hall, and coming down towards him through the trees, he caught the flutter of a petticoat. For a moment, he became rose-colour—not from motives of delicacy, for the petticoat was a long way off, but from the force and suddenness of an emotion that he could not resist. Lotty was about to join him, to take his hand, to speak with him. He felt inclined to flee to the inn, and bid the captain come—to whom, and not to him, this visit was obviously designed. The distance must have deceived her beautiful eyes, and she had taken him for her beloved object. But it was already too late for flight ; she had left the cover of the wood by this time, and was coming through the corn-field, like Ruth to Boaz, only Boaz was asleep in the *Wheatsheaf* : and now awhile the Roman ruin shut her from his view. What should he say, what should he do ? Ought he to offer some excuse for the captain's somnolency, or to ignore it, or to say he had left him on the shore somewhere, writing her name with his walking-stick on the sand ? He was prepared to take any course that would please her most ; to shield, to praise—but here she came in sight again, much nearer, and he perceived, with mingled relief and chagrin, that it was not Lotty at all, but Mrs. Sheldon ! She was a tall fine woman, and of a graceful carriage, yet he felt aggrieved with himself that distance should have lent such enchantment to her that he had taken her for her lovely guest ; nor had the mistake, it appeared, been reciprocal, since the lady's first words, after her "Good-morning," were, "I felt sure that it was you, Mr. Litton, who had come out to enjoy this beautiful morning, and

not that sluggard Reggie. I do believe that he was secretly rejoiced last night when I forbade him to call upon his inamorata before eleven o'clock this morning. The dear fellow has made a charming choice, has he not ? ”

“ Yes, indeed. Miss Brown is very beautiful, and, as it seems to me, has a disposition calculated to make any man happy.”

“ How long have you known her ? ”

This question rather staggered Walter, for the hours which he had passed in Lotty's company had not been estimated in his mind by their mere number at all ; his life seemed to be divided into two portions of about equal length—the one during which he had not known Lotty, and the other during which he had. Brought face to face with the facts, by Mrs. Sheldon's inquiry, he felt that there was something ridiculous in replying : “ Since yesterday ; ” so he answered evasively : “ Oh, only very recently ; but I have seen her during such a trying time, that I seem to know more about her than I should have learnt in months of ordinary acquaintance.”

“ I see,” said Mrs. Sheldon dryly. “ Well, I too have seen her under exceptional circumstances, and, though I quite agree with you as to her good looks, her character appears to me to be a little weak.”

“ You must remember, Mrs. Sheldon,” answered Walter quickly, “ that the circumstances are not only exceptional, but, in your case, are not altogether favourable. Up to the moment of your reception of her, she was not quite certain that it would be a kind one ; that she was utterly alone—nay, worse than alone—till you held out your arms to her ; and had really no opportunity of shewing any strength of character, even if she possessed it. Moreover, she is so devoted to your nephew, that her individuality is, for the present, as it were, lost in his.”

“ For the present, you say, Mr. Litton : you do not think this devotion of hers, then, is likely to stand the test of matrimony ? ”

“ Nay ; indeed, I implied nothing of the kind,” said Walter earnestly. “ I only meant that the young lady is placed just now in a most difficult and embarrassing situation, and needs the most charitable construction to be put on her words as well as actions.”

"I see you are a true knight-errant, Mr. Litton, and happy should be the lady whose colours you elect to wear upon your helm," answered Mrs. Sheldon, with a scarce perceptible sigh. "Dear Reggie, I fear, is not quite such a Don Quixote. He would do battle, of course, for his own fair lady, but not for another's, as you have been doing. She is fortunate in having so disinterested an advocate."

Walter felt not only uncomfortable, but even abashed; he was not unconscious that he had been somewhat enthusiastic in his praise of the object of his friend's choice, and that it was no more his place to be so—nor, indeed, so much—than it was Mrs. Sheldon's. "I still, however, think that Lotty is weak," continued that lady, musing; "not only born to be led rather than to lead, which is the fate of our sex, but, what is not so usual with us, well content with that dependent position. However, that is the less to be regretted, since Reggie has will enough for two. I don't think he would stand much opposition in a wife, after the honeymoon days were over; what do you say, Mr. Litton?"

"I think Selwyn likes to have his way, like most of us men," answered Walter.

"You are virtuous," said Mrs. Sheldon, smiling, "for you withstand the temptation of criticising an absent friend. Well, I am his aunt, you know—though it seems rather ridiculous perhaps——"

"It seems incredible," said Walter gallantly. "When I first saw you, I thought Selwyn had been playing one of his jokes upon us in saying that he was your nephew."

"But it really is so," said Mrs. Sheldon: "my father and Reginald's were always taken for brothers, so nearly were they of an age, and yet they belonged to different generations. Well, as I was saying, I am his near relative, and privileged to speak the truth about Reggie. I think this young lady very suitable to him in many respects; but, of course, he runs a tremendous risk. I mean, of course," added she, in answer to Walter's questioning look, "as to the money. I am not a mercenary person, I hope, but I know men can't live upon air."

"Nor young ladies either, I conclude," said Walter dryly.

"Well, yes; they can live upon love, which comes to the same thing, my dear Mr. Litton. There is a great deal of

nonsense talked about the expensive requirements of girls of the present day, and of how men are afraid to marry them in consequence ; but the fact is, it is the men who are most afraid of being poor. It is true that they have mixed more in the world, and therefore seen more of the inconveniences of poverty than the young people of my own sex, but, in addition to that, they are more selfish, and (if I may use the word without cant) less spiritual. Even the most foolish girl, whose happiness seems dependent upon the smiles of what is called 'Society,' has capabilities of self-sacrifice in her for the sake of him she loves, such as you men do not dream of ; nay, she would not be conscious, as all you would be—for never yet did a man give up for another's sake so much as the smoking of a cigar without patting himself on the back for it—that it *was* a sacrifice, so long as the husband continued to be what he seemed when he was her lover. If his love is not meat, drink, and clothing to her, it is all beside those three essentials ; and possessing it, she can dispense with almost everything else."

The change in Mrs. Sheldon's manner, as she thus spoke, was very remarkable : her lively, yet somewhat cynical air had wholly disappeared, and was replaced by a certain passionate earnestness. "It is possible," was Walter's involuntary thought, "that Society may have judged this woman harshly, after all ; she may herself have married one who did not continue to be the man he had seemed, or whom she discovered, perhaps, to be the lover of somebody else." His heart, always tender towards womankind, was moved with pity, and his face betrayed it.

"I am speaking of men and women generally, Mr. Litton," said she, in a softened tone, "for there are women as hard as nails (as Reginald would say), and men more noble than the best of women ; and in this particular case, I do not doubt there will be love enough, and on the right side, to make it no hardship to dispense with luxuries. It is the vulgar meat, drink, and clothing question that is the present problem. If Brown *père* refuses to be reconciled, how are the young folks to live ?"

"That is the very inquiry that I ventured to put to Selwyn last night," observed Walter gravely, "but one which he was either unable or disinclined to answer. He has his pay, of course."

"That is nothing," answered Mrs. Sheldon. "He has always looked upon it as so much pocket-money, to be spent in cigars, and sodas and brandy. The inheritance he received from his parents was to a great extent anticipated before it came to him, and he has been living on it—that is, on the principal—ever since. I should be surprised, even, if he could shew a fair balance-sheet, and start in life to-day with anything to the good, if all his debts were paid."

"Good Heavens!" cried Litton, "this is terrible. I knew Selwyn called himself a poor man; but I thought that was considering his position in a crack cavalry regiment; poor, compared with such a man as myself, for instance. I felt that it was indiscreet of him to marry; but if what you say is true"—Walter hesitated, for he was about to say something harsh.

"If what I say is true, and it *is* true," said Mrs. Sheldon, "this marriage is Madness, you were about to observe. It is worse than madness—unless he has good cause to reckon upon the forgiveness of this young girl's father—it is suicide. It is upon this very matter that I came down here this morning to have a few words with you. I wanted to know, from a really trustworthy source, what chance there was of a reconciliation."

"My dear Mrs. Sheldon, I know less of that even than yourself," returned Walter, a sort of diorama of poor Lotty's married life projecting itself on his brain—a little whirl of gaiety, then debt and duns, the shifts of penury, and at last the depths of it—and filling him with indescribable distress. "I cannot, will not think that matters are quite so bad with Selwyn as you describe. If they are, how did he *himself* look forward to extricate *himself* from his difficulties, supposing this—this running-away had never happened?"

"By a lucky marriage," observed Mrs. Sheldon coolly. "Reggie has no expectations in the way of money at all; but there is an Irish cousin of his, a baronet, to whose title, although to nothing else, for he has nothing to leave, he is the heir. This man is both old and ailing, and in all probability my nephew will soon become 'Sir Reginald.' He flattered himself, and with reason, that with a handle to his name, his good looks would procure him a rich wife, when it should become absolutely necessary to him to redeem his fortunes by matrimony. With such personal advantages, aided by the glitter of his

Crimean medal, he could hardly, indeed, have failed. But now, if he has overrated the strength of Brown *père's* affection for his offspring, he has done for himself altogether."

"He has done for somebody else also, it appears to me," said Walter bitterly.

Mrs. Sheldon shrugged her plump shoulders and threw out her little hands: "That goes without saying, Mr. Litton: man and wife are one; such, at least, is the view of the law."

"And I suppose they must now be man and wife," observed Walter mournfully. There was nothing of selfishness in his thought, only commiseration for what seemed the wretchedness of Lotty's future; but it was with a sarcastic smile that his companion answered: "The alternative would be even worse, under the circumstances, my good sir, for the 'somebody else,' for whom you express so disinterested a solicitude. Matters have gone too far, in the eyes of the world, to admit of retreat, even if Reginald would listen to such a proposition. The girl is of age, and even if she were not, the law is not so paternal as it is (perhaps fortunately) supposed to be by young ladies and their would-be swains. If she were a ward in Chancery, then, indeed, even Reginald's will would have to give way for once, and I myself might get into serious trouble for giving my countenance—though, you will do me the justice to own, I had not the opportunity of refusing it—to yesterday's escapade. You must never run away with a ward in Chancery, remember—unless she is somebody else's wife;" and Mrs. Sheldon broke into a light musical laugh, that startled Walter not a little.

"You are shocked," said she, "at my want of gravity; but what would you have? The mischief is done, and there is nothing left but to make the best of it. If you will take my advice, you will not put Reginald in a huff by useless expostulation upon a matter which is, after all, his own concern; nor shall I make Lotty sad by allusion to her blank prospects. If evil is to come, it will come soon enough, and let us at least spare her the misery of expecting it. She will be up by this time, and looking for her hostess, so I must say *au revoir*."

"One moment," said Walter earnestly. "May I ask how long—I mean, how soon will the marriage take place?"

"Well, doubtless as soon as the law will permit it. In a case of special license—you will think I have these things at my

finger-ends, but I was married myself," here she gaily touched her wedding-ring, "under these very circumstances—the period of residence is of no consequence. I hope we may succeed in preventing you being bored to death at Penaddon for the very short time that will be necessary to get the document from Doctors' Commons."

"I thought of going back home—that is, to town," said Walter hesitatingly. "I only came down to look after Selwyn, and now, of course, I shall be no longer necessary to him."

"My dear Mr. Litton, you are more necessary to him than ever," replied his companion gravely; "your presence, indeed, is absolutely indispensable at the marriage itself."


"How so?" inquired Walter with amazement.

"Why, you will act, of course, as the deputy of Brown *père*. You will have to give Lotty away."

Mrs. Sheldon had turned upon her heel, and was half over the churchyard stile (exhibiting a very charming foot and ankle) before he could recall his senses, scattered by this bombshell of a reply. Give Lotty away! So inhuman a command had never been laid upon him since his first schoolmaster had bid him fetch the stick which was designed to be the instrument of his own correction,

CHAPTER V.

MRS. SHELDON'S REVENGE.

N Walter's return to the *Wheatsheaf*, he found the captain just descended from his room, and looking very handsome, but haggard. He had not slept well, he said, for his "confounded arm" had troubled him. At this spectacle, his companion's heart was instantly moved to pity, and smote him sore for its late severe judgment upon that hero. He had taken this man to task for selfishness, yet here he was maimed, or, at all events, disabled, in the performance of his duty : it could not have been a pleasant thing, however glorious, to have crossed and recrossed that Crimean valley, with the cannon-balls hurtling over it, and the grave gaping before every stride of his horse.

"My dear fellow, can I not do something to ease the pain ? A cold-water bandage, a——"

"No, no ; you might as well blow upon it," answered the captain impatiently. "But I tell you *what*, if you'll sit down, while the breakfast is getting ready, and write an application for the Special License—that will be really doing me a service. I'll sign it, of course, but writing is as hard a job for me just now as when I first learnt pot-hooks and hangers."

This was another stick to be fetched for the schoolmaster ; but Walter obeyed with a smothered sigh ; and the missive was despatched at once by messenger, in order to catch the mid-day mail from Falmouth.

In spite of his wounds and his love, the captain made a much better breakfast than Litton, though he had been out for hours in the sea-breeze.

"Gad," said the former, without notice of this circumstance, "this Penaddon air is first-rate for the appetite ; and now that that license is sent for, and one has nothing on one's mind, one feels inclined to eat for ever."

Litton thought within himself, that that poor girl up at the

Hall, for the first time separated from home and friends, and having for her sole companion a lady so well acquainted with the law of the land as respected clandestine marriages, might not be so fortunate in having "nothing on her mind;" but he kept that conviction to himself.

It was near eleven o'clock before the meal was concluded; and the captain, putting an immense cigar in his mouth, expressed his conviction that they were "due up yonder," and led the way to his aunt's residence by the footpath through the corn.

"Queer old church that," said he, with a nod in the direction of the ruin; "and a very favourite place for the 'cheap-trippers' to bring their grub to. So was the castle here—it's no more a castle, by-the-bye, than it's a lunatic asylum, but that's what they call it—until Farmer Yates stopped their little larks by putting up 'Spring-guns and man-traps set on these premises.' Did you ever see a spring-gun or a man-trap? It would probably cost a man a thousand pounds in damages, or twenty years' transportation, who should set up any such engine; and yet people believe in their existence."

"That is the case, perhaps, with some other dreadful penalties, that seem a little disproportioned to the offence," observed Litton thoughtfully.

"How so? You don't mean that one can't punish those poacher fellows?" answered the matter-of-fact captain.

"No, no," said the other, smiling; "I was referring to certain theological menaces, the effect of which may be very wholesome, like that of the board yonder, but which one ventures to hope may a little exceed the reality."

"Oh, I believe all *them*," cried the captain resolutely. "None of your free-thinking for me. I'm not strait-laced in morals and that; but when it comes to religion, that is quite a different thing. I'm a church-and-king man, I am."

"What is that?" inquired his companion dryly.

"Well, a man that swears by the Thirty-nine Articles, and respects the laws, sir—the game-laws, for instance. It is true I have neither read the one nor the other, but I take 'em on trust. That's faith, my good sir; in which I am afraid you artist gentlemen are rather deficient."

"My dear Selwyn, it is my opinion that Nature intended

you for the pulpit—to beat ‘the drum ecclesiastic,’ instead of the kettle-drum.”

“As it happens, we don’t beat kettle-drums, nor even possess them, though we do belong to the Heavy Brigade,” the captain, with a little touch of temper, the usual accompaniment of theological discussion. “It is a pity to see a clever fellow like you talking of matters you don’t understand. Here’s something which you do. Look at that fine view, yonder, through the trees: the church and the sea, and the ships, and that little beggar with the red cap, with his shrimp-net? I hope my aunt has given Lotty some shrimps for breakfast.—By jingo, there they are!”

The two ladies were walking in the wall-garden of the Hall, which, standing on a lower level than the spot where the young men stood, was completely commanded by it. Though the grounds about the house were, as we have hinted, as ill kept as the mansion was dilapidated, this did not affect their natural beauty, which was very great. The walls of the garden were crumbling to the touch of time, but moss and lichen covered them; the fruit-trees had escaped from the rusty nails that had once confined them, but their laden branches looked not less fair as they hung heavily down, and even trailed upon the ground; and though it might be difficult to tell flower from weed, so rankly did they grow together, the garden-plots blazed with colour.

This wildered Eden was bordered by a swift and brawling stream, and beside it paced Lotty and her hostess, apparently in earnest talk, and quite unconscious of the admiring eyes that were fixed upon them. The outlook to seaward had been well worthy of the captain’s encomiums, but Walter thought this home-picture even still more charming, and one fair figure in the foreground worth them both.

“How very, very beautiful!” cried he in a rapture.

“It’s a pretty spot, ain’t it?” assented the captain, “though one can’t say much for the garden. The fact is, my aunt is as poor as Job, though she has not his patience (if her husband’s testimony is to be relied on), and the whole place is tumbling to pieces. She ought to have taken a cottage—but I suppose she knows her own business best. She is clever enough and to spare. I’ll lay my life—I can tell it by the bend of her

neck—that she is pumping poor Lotty at this moment ; ‘ eliciting,’ as the police reports have it, every scrap of information concerning the Great Self-made—that’s what I call old Brown—and his belongings. I’m obliged to have all *my* wits about me, I can tell you, when she takes to cross-examining *me*. Not that I’ve anything particular to be ashamed of, more than my neighbours ; but if one has a little secret, one likes to keep it, and that woman is resolute to find it out. Scandal is the breath of life to her, so you may imagine what a difficulty of breathing she labours under at Penaddon.”

“ But why does she live there, then ? ” was Walter’s not unnatural inquiry.

“ Well, you see, she has had a quarrel with Society, and it is better to live at a place where there is nobody to visit one, than where there are plenty of fine folks about who won’t. I shall have to talk to her a bit this morning about family matters—‘ urgent private affairs,’ as we say in the Crimea—and must leave you and Lotty to get on together as you can. Young women that are ‘ bespoken ’ are not, I know, very lively companions ; but she looks upon you, I’m sure, already as an old friend. It is true ‘ the friend of the husband,’ ” added the captain, laughing, “ is rather a dangerous acquaintance ; but if I can’t trust ‘ our chaperon,’ there is no faith to be placed in man.”

Litton laughed, as he was expected to do, but the colour came into his cheek in spite of himself : it was not the blush of shame, for his nature was loyal to the core, and yet he was conscious that he was not so completely qualified for the post assigned to him as the captain imagined. No chaperon’s heart goes pit-a-pat as her charge draws nigh, no chaperon’s speech begins to fail her as she discourses (on the proprieties, for instance) to the object of her solicitude : yet both these sensations were experienced by Walter Litton within the next five minutes, at the expiration of which he found himself walking with Lotty by the little river, followed slowly, and at a considerable interval, by Selwyn and his aunt. The latter lady had saluted Walter as though she had not met him since the previous evening, which astonished him not a little, since it took for granted, what, indeed, happened to be the fact, that he had not mentioned the interview to the captain. Had she

read that reticence in his face? Or did she deem that their conversation in the churchyard had been of too confidential a kind for him to have alluded to? Or was it really true, as his friend had laughingly suggested to him, that this "grass widow," as he called her, had fallen in love with him, and wished to establish clandestine relations between them? Litton was "human" enough, and not much less of a coxcomb, perhaps, than the rest of our sex, but circumstances alter feelings as well as cases, and just now, walking by the side of Lotty, he did not like Mrs. Sheldon the better for her prudence.

The rims of Lotty's eyes were a little red, but that did not detract from her charms, in the opinion of her present companion: for that she had been weeping, only proved the tenderness of her heart. She had been somewhat overtired with her journey, she said, in answer to his inquiries, but was well enough in health. As to her spirits, she could not help being anxious about those she had left at home. That was only natural, Walter allowed, yet expressed his confident expectation that, in a week or two, she would, as the captain's bride, be as cherished a member of her family as ever.

"Nay, Mr Litton, you do not know my father," answered she tearfully: "I am afraid I shall have offended him past forgiveness. Reginald does not like to look upon the dark side of things, I know, far less to talk of it; but papa will be very, very angry, I know; and Lily, oh, so sad!"

Here she hung her pretty head, and a sob was heard, which wrung Walter's heart.

"But it is better to talk about it," said he softly, "than to let a woe unuttered prey upon your mind. I cannot fancy that any one who knows you—far less who loves you, as your father must do—can very long hold out against your pleading. Selwyn is a gentler man, well born, well bred, a soldier who has distinguished himself in action, one any man might be proud to call his son-in-law. It is not as though you had married, I do not say beneath you—for you could never have stooped to that—but a mere nobody—like myself, for instance."

Perhaps it was agreeable to him to put the case, even supposititiously, in this way, or perhaps he fondly expected that his companion would remonstrate against this lowly estimation

of his own position (which in reality he by no means thought so ill of), but Lotty took no notice of this personal illustration whatever.

"No, no," sighed she; "it is not that; but my father has set his heart upon his daughters making what are called 'good matches;' he wishes us to marry rich men. And now that I have chosen Reginald, it will be all the worse for poor dear Lily. Papa will choose for her himself some odious creature who has money, and she will be made miserable all through me.

"Nay, it is surely wrong to harass yourself with the fear of so remote a contingency," urged Walter; "for having lost one daughter—or dreaming for the present that he has lost her—your father will be slow to part with the other; he will keep her at home to comfort him, and be won through her, in the end, to a reconciliation with you and yours. It must be so, I feel confident, and especially" (here Litton gave a little bow) "if your sister Lilian is like yourself."

The bow was quite thrown away, indeed it is doubtful whether Lotty observed it, but, to his questions, she replied with simplicity: "Oh, Lilian is worth a thousand of me. She is wise, and dutiful, and good!—oh, so good, Mr Litton! And I know she is breaking her heart for me, though I am so unworthy of her love;" and she put up her little hands before her face and sobbed anew.

"If all the rest you have told me," said Walter earnestly, "is not more true than *that*—I mean that you are unworthy of her love—I must be excused for not sharing your fears. Sooner or later, all must needs be well with you, since justice rules the world. The law allows you, being of full age, to make your own choice in marriage; and in forbidding you to do so, your father is himself disobedient to the law. You have immediate happiness in prospect; do not dim its brightness by apprehensions that time will shew are groundless."

"I will try, indeed I will try, Mr. Litton, to look on the bright side of things," sighed poor Lotty, and, like a chidden child, she dried her eyes, and strove to smile.

"That's a brave girl," said Walter approvingly; "and here comes one to reward you for your courage, and who will know how to comfort you better than I."

That was the last effort which Litton made to intrude his own personality, where, it must be acknowledged, it had no rightful place ; at the same time, it was very innocently meant ; he did love her, with all his heart, but with such a flame, that if his heart had been of glass, it would have been seen to burn with purity ; there were no noxious exhalations of envy or hatred of his friend, nor did a thought of rivalry mingle with it. He was content to be a brother to Lotty. If she would have regarded him in that light ; but even that, as it seemed, was not to be. She was so wrapped up in others, in her Reginald, and in her own belongings, that she had shewn herself scarcely conscious of his existence ; and with that acknowledgment of his services of the previous day, as it seemed, he must be content for evermore. Her look, as she spoke it, was still mirrored in his mind ; her words were stereotyped there, beautiful to read and read again, like some sacred text, all gilt and colour, which a mother hangs on the wall of her child's chamber, to meet his eyes at morn and eve ; but there were to be no more such looks nor words. Why should there be ? He had been overpaid already for what he had done ; and besides, there would have been danger in such thanks. This he felt to be the case, not so much from any consciousness of latent longings for that forbidden fruit, as from his indifference to other dainties. Mrs. Sheldon, with whom he was thrown *tête-à-tête*, as a matter of course, from that hour, until he left Penaddon, was more than gracious to him, but without kindling a spark of gratitude ; the position was expressed by the formula of, that great stumbling-block to the female intellect, the Rule of Three : As Mr. Litton's delicate attentions were to Lotty, so were those of Mrs. Sheldon to Mr. Litton.

There were doubtless good points about the character of his hostess, but she was not so much above the average of her sex as to take this insensibility in good part ; that a young man of two-and-twenty, no fool, indeed, but of a frank and simple nature, should have such opportunities of a little flirtation with her, and neglect them ; that she should put forth all her strength to make him captive, and yet fail, was a circumstance that she exceedingly resented. She knew something of his own art, and went out sketching with him to the most picturesque and romance-inspiring spots, in vain ; she sang to him to the music of

the wave, yet showed herself no syren she told him her own touching history—so much of it, that is, as it suited her to tell him—without evoking a single spark of sympathy more than the barest civility demanded. It was long since she had made a conquest, and that made her all the more eager to bring this young gentleman to her feet ; her weapons, she flattered herself, were as formidable as ever, and she had certainly not forgotten how to use them. Yet he was as invulnerable as Achilles. Why she wanted to wound him, she probably did not know herself, nor what she would have done with the poor wretch, had she succeeded. A man's intentions in such cases, even if not honourable, are generally definite ; a male "flirt," though such a thing may exist, is a *lusus nature*. Mrs. Sheldon was simply obeying an instinct of nature ; and just as a sportsman who delights in shooting, though the contents of the game-bag are not to be his own, is annoyed at missing, so was she annoyed, and even ashamed, at her ill success.

It is not with the mistress of Penaddon Hall that this story has mainly to do, else it would not be uninteresting to note the rapidity with which the barometer of this lady's feelings, with respect to the young painter, rose and fell ; within those few days, the arrow performed a complete circle. It pointed to "set fair" as long as it could, and then something gave way (it was her patience), and it fell to "very stormy."

On the day when the stick which poor Walter had had to fetch was used upon his own back—when the license arrived, that is, and he had "given" Lotty "away" to Reginald, and the happy pair had departed for the honeymoon, and the fly that was to take himself to the railway stood at the Hall door, Mrs. Sheldon made him a farewell present ; not a piece of plate but a piece of her mind.

"I will not say I am glad you are going, Mr. Litton," said she, as she held out her hand, "yet I honestly confess it seems to me that you have been here long enough, for your own happiness and for that of another."

Walter could scarcely believe his ears. He had had a dim notion for some time that this lady had been endeavouring to get up a flirtation with him, to which, perhaps, he had not responded very gallantly ; but he had taken Reginald's statement, that she had fallen in love with him, mostly as a joke, for which, in-

deed, it was half intended ; this sudden suggestion, therefore, made apparently in all seriousness, that he had fallen a victim to her charms, staggered him not a little. To reply that he was sorry to have made her unhappy, was a flight of coxcombry beyond his powers, yet it really seemed as if that was expected of him.

"Believe me, my dear Mrs. Sheldon," stammered he, "I shall never forget these days at Penaddon, and all that, thanks to you, I have enjoyed during my visit."

"Endeavour rather to forget them," answered she gravely, "and especially what you have *missed*. I know your secret, and I will keep it, Mr. Litton ; but I cannot but express a sense of relief that Lotty has left my roof, and with her *husband*."

With that Parthian shaft, she withdrew into her sitting-room, closing the door behind her, and leaving him standing in the hall, transfixed ! He had had what is called "a classical education," and the *spretæ injuria formæ* of the poet recurred to his memory with a blinding flash. If he had despised the charms of his hostess, she had certainly taken her revenge.

How wretched was that weary drive over the moor to Falmouth, which, unhappily too, he could not but contrast with what it must have been to the pair who had preceded him ! How desolate was the sea, how barren the land, to *his* eyes, how bright and glorious to theirs ! For them was love, and the fruition of it ! for him too was love—he confessed it ; how could he ignore it, when another had read it written on his heart, through all the armour of duty, friendship, honour, which he had put on in vain, and with which he had striven to hide it from himself ! For him was love, alas, and loneliness. The spring of his life was broken, for hope was gone. If fame had been that day within his reach, he would not have cared to put forth his hand to grasp it. Oh, evil hour, in which he had consented to accompany his friend to the fair south, and tend him ! Penaddon was hateful to him. He had many a record of it in his sketchbook ; its silver sands, its quiet bay, its time-hallowed ruins by the shore ; and he would burn them all. Yet what would that avail, since the recollection of them—every spot she had admired, every scene in which she had set foot—would be ever present to his eyes ! As to continuing in the neighbourhood, concluding there what he had once looked

forward to as his "holiday," that was not to be thought of. He would return to town and Work—would work his fingers off, and his brains away, would kill himself with work, if possible; for the grave itself seemed welcome to him!

Poor Walter! It is not at all times that Heaven is kind, for refusing to lift the curtain of our future; we often groan and writhe at the prospect of misfortunes which do not come, although they seem so near that the very shadow of their approach overwhelms us with its gloom; and even the wretchedness that is present, and makes us in love with death, and seems beyond relief, is not seldom mitigated, nay, dissipated, by an unexpected ray coming from an unlooked-for-place—as though dawn should break at midnight and from the West—and making our murky sky a cloudless blue.

CHAPTER VI.

IN BEECH STREET.

IF there is any panacea for wretchedness in this useful world, it is work, and work only. If all the suicides, and the motives that led to them, could be tabulated, it is certain that the want of work—incapacity for it, or inability to obtain it—would be found, in nine cases out of ten, under the column "Cause;" even the Hopeless—those who work without prospect of reward in any form—do not commonly leave the sunshine for "the sunless land" while hand or brain can still find employment. The uttermost misery of human life is probably expressed by that vulgar phrase which we read every day applied to some starving wretch, in our newspapers, with careless eyes, or at most with a shrug of our shoulders—"out of work." Walter Litton was so far wise that he knew this. Left to himself, while still a lad, in the Great Babylon, amid temptations against which no common virtue is of avail, he had not succumbed to them, mainly because he had set himself to work; while others of his age, though under task-masters, had shirked it. His nature was wholesome, and he kept it so, by this simple means: in an atmosphere of vice and pollution, he carried about with him this purifier, this antidote, this disinfectant. He had faith, it is true, for his mind was reverent, and he had had a good mother; but faith without work would not have saved him. Among other marvellous virtues which employment confers upon him who has his heart in it, is a respect for others who likewise toil. The honest worker, no matter in what guild he is a craftsman, feels no contempt for those who labour in a humbler sphere. It is the idler, useless to others, and a burden to himself, who seeks to justify his own indolence by despising these. We have seen a state fall to pieces mainly from its own rottenness, wherein to work was held to be shameful and a badge of servitude; and the condition of the mere pleasure-seeker is like unto

it. At the least stroke of misfortune, he collapses ; though, while prosperity lasts, he sits above the thunder like a god, and smiles contemptuously upon the busy hands that supply his needs.

To those who are acquainted with artist-life, there is nothing more characteristic than the behaviour of a painter to his paid sitter ; in this are found the extremes of rudeness and refinement, of selfishness and consideration, of coarseness and chivalry. When the model happens to be of the female sex, the case becomes all the more significant. It is the opinion of the outer world that "the young persons" who sit for the Imogens that adorn the walls of our picture-galleries, or typify Innocence with her Dove, or Faith with her palm-branch, do not afford what is called "improving" society for the young artist, nor the young artist for them. The whole Royal Academy, on the other hand, are zealous to affirm that the pursuit of art is far too elevating to permit its votaries to stoop to ignoble flirtation ; nay, that not only good taste, but a certain reverence for their profession, compels decorum—*noblesse oblige*—towards these handmaidens. To differ from a R. A., upon any question concerning his own calling, is (as is well known) an intolerable impertinence ; and I will only venture to affirm that, in the days when one frequented studios, I remarked that honest young gentlemen of the brush used a brusqueness of manner towards their Imogen which suggested some distrust of their own virtue. It is easier, I fancy (though, singularly enough, it does not require so strong a flight of fancy), to conceive a lay-figure to be a young lady, than to conceive a young lady to be a lay-figure ; and in order to accomplish this latter feat, we must not be too polite.

Mr. Jack Pelter, for example, who, as we have mentioned, was wont to go halves in his models of both sexes with his fellow-lodger, Mr. Litton, was exceedingly gruff and tyrannous with the "Imogens"—a system which he had at first adopted from prudential motives ; it had kept him heart-whole while that organ had been young and impressionable ; and now that it was tough and leathery, and his soul defied enchantment, he was gruff from habit.

"You're a precious deal too civil, young fellow," he would growl to Litton, who, to a woman, and a poor one, could not

be otherwise than the very pink of politeness ; " and some day or other, you'll repent it."

But no entanglement of the kind his mentor had suggested had happened to Litton, and it was less likely to happen now than ever. He worked even more diligently than before, since his return from Penaddon ; but the recollection of her he had met and lost there could not be thereby effaced ; his heart was so occupied with Lotty, that is, with fears and hopes upon her account—" Would her father forgive her ? and if not, would her husband still be kind ?"—that the sacred place in it, in which a man keeps the idols he worships without stain, had no room for the image of another woman.

Otherwise, parents and guardians, *all* one's female relatives, and men of the world generally (who know everything, and yet believe in nothing), would have thought it a dangerous thing for him to be painting Nellie Neale for two hours *per diem* in an attitude of supplication. What made it *more* dangerous for him, they would have thought (and also for *her*, if such young persons were worth thinking of at all), was, that Miss Ellen Neale was not a professional model. She was the daughter of " a cobbler who lived"—or at least laboured—" in a stall" at the corner of a neighbouring street, and had never before " sat" to an artist. Litton, who was far from being a dandy, had business relations with her father ; and while bidding him send for a pair of boots that wanted mending, had seen this pretty little creature bring him his mid-day meal from home, wrapped neatly up in a basket ; from which circumstance he had christened her on the spot Red Riding-hood, and she had learned in time to call him grandmamma. The honest young fellow perhaps adopted this latter title to give him a reverence in her eyes, which his years and looks might well have failed to extort from her ; and if that blood-relationship had actually existed between them, his behaviour towards her could not have been more exemplary. Mr. Jack Pelter had not been in town when this young lady's professional services had been secured, nor was he now in need of an " Imogen," pecuniary necessities, consequent upon certain extravagances of the vacation, having caused him to confine himself to the less sublimated but more remunerative occupation of portrait-painting ; so Walter had his present model to himself. *He* also had been

taking portraits, since his return from Penaddon ; and though not disposed of at a very high figure, these had furnished him with funds for more than his needs, as well as provided him with this excellent counterfeit presentment of Philippa, Edward's queen, in the act of beseeching that monarch to spare the lives of the citizens of Calais.

"A very uncommon subject, truly," said Jack Pelter, in his usual character of cynical, but friendly critic. "But why not strike out something perfectly original, my dear fellow—such as the Finding of Harold's Body after Hastings?"

"Because I mean to shew," returned the other with equal gravity, "how a great artist can appropriate a story, however often pictured, and make it his own on canvas, just as Shakespeare has done in literature."

So every afternoon, from two until the wintry dusk closed in, Philippa of Hainault knelt upon a soft cushion of Utrecht velvet (or something like it), on the second floor of No. 99 Beech Street, and held up prayerful hands to the stern Edward, who thus replied to her supplications: "The head a shade more to the right—the hands a little lower—just the faintest smile, as if you saw the ruffian was yielding. Thank you ; that's beautiful" (which it *was*). "If you are getting to feel stiff or tired, Red Riding-hood, be sure to mention it."

"I do just a little, grandmamma."

"Then get up, and trot about."

This happened many times during each sitting, if Queen Philippa's position could be called so ; and on one occasion, just after one of these trotings about, and when Nellie had fallen on her knees again, and was about to supplicate for the poor citizens with renewed vigour, there was a knock at the door, and in walked Captain Reginald Selwyn. The house in Beech Street did not boast of any groom of the chambers ; when the front-door bell was rung, a diminutive maid-of-all-work answered it, and directed the ringer to the first or second floor, according as Mr. John Pelter or his friend was the object of his visit ; neither of them had many callers, but Litton had far fewer than Pelter ; the time had not yet come, if it was ever to do so, when critics should drop in, who would have a word to say, under the head of Art Gossip, about the forthcoming picture by Mr. W. Litton ; and still less for patrons or picture-dealers to

shew their critical faces, with a view of bespeaking some immortal work before it left the easel. So Walter expected no company on that day, but least of all a visit from Reginald Selwyn. Many months had elapsed since the marriage of which he had himself been the aider and abettor, but not a line had the captain written to him from the day they had parted at Penaddon Hall ; nor could his wounded arm have been an excuse for so long a silence, for there he stood in the door-way, with all his limbs like other people's, except that they looked more shapely and strong than most, which indeed they were. His face had lost its pallor, but also, or so it seemed to Walter's attentive eyes, much of its gaiety and brightness.

"Why, Litton, my good fellow, you must have thought me dead, as well as 'done for.' Matri"—Here his glance lit upon Philippa, Edward's queen, who had risen hastily from her cushion, and was regarding the new-comer, with much embarrassment. It was the first time that her sittings had been intruded upon by any one, save Mr. Pelter, whom she did not "mind," and looked upon as another "grandmamma."

"I think we will finish for to-day, Miss Neale," said Walter quickly, "as our time is nearly up, and this is an old friend whom I have not seen for long."

"I hope the young lady will not go on my account," said the captain gallantly.

But Nellie had already exchanged her high-peaked head-gear for the bonnet of everyday life, and thrown over her mediæval robes her warm winter cloak ; and while Walter was once more explaining that the sitting had been nearly over in any case, she slipped through the door, which Selwyn held open for her, and, with a hurried bow, in acknowledgment of that civility, was gone.

"By Jove!" said the captain gravely, "this is what you artists call the pursuit of your profession, is it? I don't wonder that portrait-painting is so popular."

"My dear Selwyn, you don't suppose that that poor girl comes here to have her portrait taken, do you?"

"No ; by jingo! I don't," answered the captain sententiously.

"I mean," continued Walter, with resolute sedateness, "that though my patrons are not unhappily in the highest position in society, Miss Neale is not one of them. She is a good honest

girl, who helps her father by sitting to me as a model for a few shillings an hour."

"O, indeed! she is a model, is she?" returned the captain, still very incredulously. "A model of what?"

"Oh, of anything, according to the subject, you know."

Nothing would have been easier, or more convincing, one would have thought, then to have shewn his friend the picture of Philippa—which was already advanced towards completion—in corroboration of this statement; but Walter's first act, on seeing the captain, had been to throw a large piece of linen over the work in question, and rapidly ply his brush on another piece of canvas, which, as it so happened, did not represent the female face divine at all.

"Why, that's the old church at Penaddon, surely," exclaimed Selwyn, whose attention was easily diverted from one subject to another. "It's just as well you should have sketched it when you did, for my aunt writes me that these stormy seas have eaten into it worse than ever this winter, so that there is hardly any of it left."

"Well, never mind the church," said Walter; "I want to hear of your own affairs. How are *you*, old fellow, and—and—Mrs. Selwyn?"

He felt that he was blushing, hesitating, and making a mess of his kind inquiries generally, for the idea had struck him, it was just possible that Mrs. Sheldon might have written to her nephew about something else beside the encroachments of the sea, might, out of spite and malice, have communicated to him that suspicion about himself, which had overwhelmed him with such confusion on his departure from Penaddon.

"Oh, I'm well enough, and Lotty too," said the captain—that is, in health; but that old hunk, her father, will not have a word to say to us, and what is of much more consequence, will not help us with so much as a sixpenny-piece. We are having a very rough time of it, I can tell you."

"I am very, very sorry to hear it," said Walter earnestly, his mind reverting to the fate his apprehensions had prefigured for Lotty, exposed to the keen bite of poverty, and shorn of all the comforts that had by use become necessities to her—a beautiful and tender flower fading and failing for want of light and air.

"Yes ; it is an ugly story, Litton, and likely to be uglier. It was a risky thing, that marriage of mine, of course, but I never dreamt that things would have gone so deuced hard with me. My sick-leave cannot last for ever, and yet I can't go back to my regiment as a married man. We couldn't *live*—no, not even in barracks—and that's the short and long of it."

"But, surely, my dear friend, other people who are captains in the army——"

"Yes, yes ; but they don't owe a couple of thousand pounds to start with," broke in the other impatiently. "It's no use crying over spilt milk, but the fact is, I have made a precious mess of it. There will be nothing for it but to sell my commission, and then to cut and run, before the Jews can get hold of me. Talk about the miseries of human life ; I don't believe there's any one of them to compare with the want of ready-money !"

"How very, very sorry I am," repeated Walter.

"Yes ; I am sure you are ; but I wish I could make old Brown sorry. Lilian does her best to move him, she says, and perhaps she does ; but no doubt there is a great temptation to her to keep us out of the old man's favour. He has a hundred thousand pounds to leave, if he has a penny ; and that is a much better thing than a hundred thousand pounds divided by *two*, you see ; for there is no doubt about it that Lotty was to have been Lily's co-heiress."

"But surely your sister-in-law would never be actuated by such a base motive ? Your wife, I know, has the greatest affection for her, and confidence in her goodness."

"So she had in *mine*, for that matter," observed the captain with a sneer ; "yet, I suppose, I was not much better than other people. I say nothing against Lilian : it does seem strange that she can't do anything for us with the old fellow. He has *some* natural affection, I suppose, in spite of his treatment of Lotty, and a woman can always bring a man round, if she will take the trouble."

"How old is your father-in-law ?" inquired Walter.

"Oh, there's no chance of his popping off the hooks, if you mean *that*. He's no chicken, it is true ; but he's one of those City fogies who are as tough as gutta-percha, and take a deal of care of themselves into the bargain. I daresay, if anything

was to happen to him—I am sure I wish him in Heaven—Lilian would do something for us, though not one-tenth of what my wife expects of her ; but while the grass is growing that is to cover *his* grave, the steed will starve, my good fellow."

"I was not alluding to his death," observed Walter thoughtfully ; "but I have noticed, even in my guardian of late, and much more in other old men, that, with increasing age, the character softens."

"The brain may do so," answered the captain contemptuously, "but not—at least, I'll answer for it in old Brown's case—the disposition. He's as hard as nails. If I could get the commander-in-chief, or some tremendous swell, to intercede for us with him, instead of his own daughter, something might be done, I believe, for he's a snob to the backbone. He would grovel on all-fours, I understand, before a peer of the realm."

"Then he ought to be at least tolerably civil to the heir-presumptive of a baronetcy."

"Well, ridiculous as it seems, Litton, that is the one hope I have of circumventing the old fellow. If my first-cousin was to die—and I hear he is in a very ticklish state—I honestly believe that my self-made father-in-law would not shew himself so utterly inexorable to me as Sir Reginald ; it is not in his British nature. But there ! when do Irishmen ever die, or do anything else you want of them, when they promise it ? No, no ; my cousin will come round, if it is but to spite me, and I shall starve to death as plain Reginald Selwyn."

"When you speak of starving, my dear Reginald, you are, of course, merely using a very violent metaphor," said Walter with anxiety.

"I don't know about a metaphor," answered the captain ; "but this half-sovereign," and he took one out of his waistcoat pocket, and held it between his finger and thumb, "is the very last of all the Mohicans ; and when that's gone, I shall not know where to turn for another. Lilian has helped her sister a little out of her private funds ; but, as though the old wretch suspected that she might be giving us assistance, her father keeps her very ill supplied."

Throughout this interview, the captain had been smoking a very excellent cigar, which could not have cost less than eightpence in Regent Street ; but this was doubtless either one of

the large stock he had in hand when he became a Benedict, or he was smoking it—in which view it might be considered economical—as North American Indians smoke their pipes, in order to allay the pangs of hunger.

"I regret, indeed," said Walter, blushing exceedingly as his manner was when embarrassed, "that you should have allowed yourself to come to such straits, without applying to an old friend. I have been taking portraits wholesale, and have quite a balance at my banker's. Come, let me lend you fifty pounds;" and he pulled out his cheque-book.

"You are the best fellow out," said the captain; "but it is a deuced unpleasant thing to borrow of one's friends. Now, what is Lilian's is Lotty's, or ought to be so; so in that case I feel no compunctions——"

"Then you should feel them still less with me," interrupted Walter, thrusting the cheque into his hand. "You would borrow my umbrella, if it rained, I suppose, and I had no occasion to go out; then why not my money when I don't want it? What a fuss is made in the world about borrowing or lending a few pounds! You may ask for a shilling to pay your cab-fare, if you have no change, but gold is a sacred commodity, it appears."

"It's a commodity that it is precious inconvenient to be without, old fellow," said the captain, putting the cheque in his empty purse. "I won't give you an I.O.U., for that would be waste paper, but I will pay you when I can, upon my honour. You don't suppose, I hope, that I came here to-day, Litton, with any expectation of becoming your debtor?"

"Good heavens, Selwyn, how you talk," exclaimed Walter; "of course I suppose nothing of the kind. I took it for granted that you came to see me, as one of your oldest friends; when I come to see you, it will not be concluded, I hope, that I come as a creditor?"

"Don't be savage with me, my good Litton," returned the captain gravely. "I daresay, I don't express myself very prettily, but the fact is, I'm soured. The harrow of poverty takes all the skin off the man that is under it, and makes him tender to touch. He thinks everybody is crediting him with the basest motives, and in denying them—*qui s'excuse s'accuse*—he seems to others to acknowledge their existence. I know

I'm savage with everybody, and quite as ready to pick a quarrel as a friend's pocket."

Walter did not reply; he pitied Selwyn, but he pitied Lotty infinitely more. What a life must she be leading, destitute of material comforts, and exposed to the outbreaks of her husband's temper, "sourer," as he confessed himself to be, by disappointment, and "savage with everybody!" Was it possible that he could give any assistance to her, beside money? he wondered. If he were to see her, perhaps she could suggest something—and his heart did yearn to see her.

"There's another thing," continued Selwyn bitterly, "which poverty—'the test of virtue,' 'the tonic bitters of life,' as fools have called it—does for me—it makes one as proud as Lucifer. Nothing, for example, would seem more natural to you than that I should say: 'Well, our home is a very humble one at present; but that will make no difference to you, old friend, so come and see us. I know it would make no difference to you, and yet I don't want to see you there.'"

"Is it worse than this?" asked Walter, laughing, and looking round his own apartment, which was of no palatial proportions, and presented such a scene of picturesque disorder—and I am afraid I must add, of dirt—as is only seen in studios.

"Well, no; our London lodgings are not so bare as my barrack-rooms, perhaps, to which you have been always welcome; but they are not such lodgings as are fit for my wife to receive company in."

"You are the best judge of that," said Walter quietly. This was an unexpected blow, yet even while he staggered under it, he felt that the punishment was wholesome; his devotion to Mrs. Selwyn was perfectly innocent; but for his own happiness, he felt that it was better that that "yearning" of his to see her should not be gratified. He could not have resisted the temptation to do so, had it been offered, but neither would he fight against his friend's denial.

"You shall come and see Sir Reginald and his lady," said the captain, laughing, "and be invited, as their friend, to dine with the great Brown. That old villain has got some particular Madeira, the thought of which makes me still more impatient of my position, since every day by which our reconciliation is

postponed (for he drinks it daily) makes an inroad on the bin.—How hard you must have been working lately, Litton! Here the captain began to look about him for the first time, his whole attention having been previously occupied in twirling and flattening his moustaches, a sure sign that he had been ill at ease. "I wonder if I've had any of *your* pictures from old Levi: he always gives *half* in pictures, and I've got quite a gallery of them ancient and modern.—Why, what's this?" and he threw aside the linen cloth that hung over the portrait of Philippa, Edward's queen.

"Oh, that's unfinished," said Walter hastily, "and I hate my pictures to be looked at till they are finished."

"O nonsense, man, you don't mind *me*," said the captain, persisting as usual in the indulgence of his own whim. "Why, this is the best picture of the lot, to my taste. So this is Miss Neale, is it? Well, I confess I should never have recognised her but for the costume. This is a much fairer girl—more like the style of Lotty."

"Do you think so?" said Walter. His tone was careless, but his face was very pale. "It is only a sketch, a portion of a larger picture. Perhaps you would like to sit for her husband, King Edward, in chain-armour; I will give you half-a-crown an hour, and your beer."

"You should have made that offer before you lent me these fifty pounds," laughed the captain, tapping his pocket. "Well, good-bye, old fellow, for the present; and if I have any good news, you may be sure you will be the first to hear it." They parted very cordially, but Walter did not accompany his friend down-stairs. He stood gazing at the uncovered picture, and muttering scornfully to himself: "I need not have been so apprehensive," ran his thoughts; "his indifference makes him blind. 'More like the style of Lotty,'" he said. Perhaps she pleads with him like this, sometimes—upon her knees. Poor Lotty!"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. JOHN PELTER AS MENTOR.

IT is astonishing how the profession of Love—that is, the love of man for woman, or *vice versa*—being of such endless variety, should be described by poets and philosophers as of only two or three kinds, or even “lumped” (as Pope, for instance, lumps it) into one. Monomania, fever, atrophy, have each their name and place in medical science; but all these diseases, and many others, are in psychology spoken of as one, as though no difference existed between them. There is, it is true, an admitted peculiarity in the case of what is called a Platonic attachment; but this term is seldom used, except in irony, and I am inclined to think that those who so make use of it are right. I have never known a Platonic attachment where the lady, at least, would not have married the gentleman if she could. That love itself is protean in its outward shape, is (in spite of the poets) now allowed. We admit that the sweetness and light of the world do not change, as Byron, for instance, would have us believe, to gall and darkness, to Corydon because Phyllis rejects him; or that the sun seems to shine for him by night, and roses to bloom for him in February, if she accepts him. He is pleased and gratified, of course, more so, doubtless, than if he had won five shillings at skittles; yet not more, perhaps, than if had won five pounds. I am speaking of a Corydon of the humbler classes, of course, when I mention so vulgar a game, and such small amounts; but if Corydon was a born gentleman, and, in the practice of his profession, the Turf, should pull off, say, fifty thousand pounds on a double event, that would probably give him almost as much pleasure as being accepted by Phyllis.

Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;
Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands;

but if such luck as we have supposed should happen to a gen-

tleman-sportsman, don't you think the glass of Time would run itself into just as golden sands as if Love held it? I must confess I do. Of course, there are some young persons who, being denied by their Beloved Objects, immediately go and hang themselves; but these are fortunately exceptional cases, which do not materially affect the census returns. A more numerous class plunge into dissipation; a remedy which, though (besides other serious objections to it) it may kill as well as cure, has undoubtedly been found to be efficacious. Others have the good fortune to see some other nice young woman, the next day, or the next month, after the disappointment, and get over it by marrying her. All of us are agreed that there are many ways of meeting; a misfortune of this kind, as well as many ways of expressing our bliss upon receiving an answer from Phyllis in the affirmative; and yet almost all are resolute to affirm that the love of Corydon for Phyllis is the same all the world over. This is a great error. Without any trespass upon that dangerous ground of Platonic attachment, a man may adore a woman with honesty and honour, whom it is utterly out of the question that he should marry, from whom it is impossible that he should receive any greater favours than a clasp of the hand or a kind word. The type is not common, because the Phyllises who are capable of inspiring such a passion are few; and such disinterested Corydons are few: but it exists. Such a love, for example, would have been entertained by Warrington for Laura, if he had met her in the first instance as the wife of Pendennis. There would have been no harm in such an attachment, nor thought of harm; but it could not have been expressed by the terms respect, regard, or friendship; nay, it would comprehend a devotion for Mrs. P. not entertained, perhaps, even by Mr. Arthur Pendennis himself.

It was some absorbing feeling of this sort which filled Walter Litton's soul with respect to Lotty; in some cases, it might not have been a disadvantageous one—indeed, an unselfish passion of this sort is often most advantageous—but Walter was too young for such a gracious burden, not, as he imagined, because life lay before him lone and barren for so many years, but because he lacked the discipline of life; he could not free himself from its influence at pleasure, and though he could forget it—that is, the smart of it—in occupation, it pervaded even the

work of his hands. It is certain that his present picture profited by this. Love, "the more ideal artist he than all," had given a spirituality to the expression of Philippa, Edward's queen, which Miss Nellie Neale, and perhaps even Lotty herself, did not possess; it was, in fact, a glorified likeness of the latter, a likeness that might easily escape the eyes of such as were but slightly acquainted with her, or had not seen her under circumstances calculated to evoke her deeper feelings, but which would strike most forcibly those who knew her best. Without, of course, recognising the source of his friend's inspiration, or even being aware of what it was, Mr. John Pelter perceived that this portrait was far in advance of anything that the young fellow had yet achieved; and he told him so, after his peculiar fashion, puffing at his pipe, and regarding this *chef-d'œuvre* with his huge flax-covered head sloped to the critical angle.

"My dear Watty," said he, "I don't wish to flatter you, but that's the most like a human creature of anything that you have yet turned out."

"I am glad to hear you say so," returned Walter, well pleased with this moderate praise, which, indeed, in Jack Pelter's mouth, implied far beyond what it expressed. A huge, good-natured giant was Jack, who knew much more of his profession, though he seldom used the slang of it, than many a man who can discourse of "his art" by the hour, and leave his hearers in the most inextricable entanglement; a man, it was true, who cared little to be known by the world at large, so long as he was known by the dealers, and was supplied by them with the funds sufficient for his not extravagant needs, but who worked as honestly, after his lights, as Raphael, whose cartoons he believed to be the most valuable bequest that any living being has left to posterity.

"Yes, Watty, this is a great advance upon your 'Drunken organ-grinders'—I beg your pardon, your 'Brigands Carousing.' The young woman's foot here is out of drawing, and I daresay the other would be, if it wasn't covered by her train; but the picture is good, sir—it's good." And Mr. John Pelter stepped back from it slowly, upsetting "Penaddon Church" as he did so, and once more regarded it with fixed attention. "You must not lump any King Edwards with a lot of this kind," continued Jack, "or else you'll spoil it."

"But Queen Philippa must be kneeling to *somebody*," urged Walter.

"Then don't let her be Queen Philippa at all. That high head-dress may very well be taken for a fool's cap; and if you write 'Forfeits' under it, the whole thing will explain itself. 'Who is the owner of *this* pretty thing? Let her kneel in one corner, dance in another,' and so on. There; don't be affronted; I'm only joking, so far as regards the title. The girl must kneel alone, that's certain. Chuck your Pinnock's England overboard, cut away the rest of the canvas, and call her 'Supplication.'"

"Upon my life, Jack, I think that a good idea."

"Of course it is. Send out for something to drink its health in. 'O for a draught of vintage full of the warm South,' something delicate and tasty, and redolent of the subject. Jenny!" roared he from the top of the stairs, "fetch a pot of stout."

Over this refreshment they discoursed the future of the immortal work.

"That must not go to the Gallery, or any of those places, Watty," said Jack, whom the generous liquor had rendered still more eulogistic. "You must have a shy with it at the big shop."

"I am sick of trying there," answered Walter despondently.

"Sick of trying! Why, you have not got a gray hair on your head! If you were *my* age" (Jack was about thirty), "you might talk of blighted hopes."

"But you have been hung, and in good places too; and yet I have heard you say that you had just as soon your pictures went to the Gallery, or straight to Pall Mall"——

"Well, well; that's because I wanted the money," interrupted the other, with irritation. "Don't you mind about me. If I said I don't care about fame, perhaps I was wrong, or perhaps I lied. Your case, at all events, is different. Follow my advice, Watty, my boy, and send 'Supplication' to run its chance with the committee. They do *sometimes* take a thing on its own merits. Remember how Campbell was hung last year, through MacCollop, R. A., taking him for a fellow-countryman. 'Death by misadventure,' as somebody said of it, when all the newspapers were down upon his daub."

"You are very encouraging," said Walter, smiling; "but nevertheless I will try the big shop."

In spite of Walter's pretended irony, there was great encouragement in Pelter's recommendation. Jack was not above the weaknesses of his calling, and could abuse a brother-artist—who was successful—as roundly as any one. But he was singularly just and honest in the main. His tenderness for his young friend was great. It was not too much to say that his hopes for his success were higher than for his own; for he was one of that increasing class who are not ambitious either of fame or fortune. As long as he could earn a competence, he was satisfied with the result of his own labours; and a competence with him meant something very modest indeed. It is not a good sign in our social life that so many men, even in comparative youth, are becoming indifferent to great gains and high distinction: if such sentiments were universal, the production of anything really great in any line of life would be rendered impossible; but it is only the natural rebound from that excessive struggle to get a head and shoulders above their fellows which distinguished the last generation, not altogether to its credit. In that contest, Friendship too often went to the wall, and every generous impulse was trodden under foot, in order that Self should rise supreme. There is no better excuse for indolence than the spectacle of successful Diligence standing all alone upon its pedestal, without friend or lover, a mark not only for envy, but for deserved contempt; and Mr. John Pelter had seen, or fancied he had seen, not a few eminent gentlemen of his own profession in that isolated position. By toiling and scraping, and denying himself all the delights of youth, there is no man so great a fool, he would argue, but that he can acquire for himself a heap of money—only to find that, by long disuse, he has lost the faculty of enjoyment. There was no great fear of this in Mr. Pelter's individual case: his capacity for pleasure was so considerable, that some of it would certainly have remained with him under the most disadvantageous circumstances; but it suited him to adopt this theory, which, it is fair to say, he acted up to in a very conscientious manner. He worked well, never “scamping” a square inch of that which he set his brush to do, but never overworked himself; he took his time over his canvas, and his ease, and did not trouble himself much with speculations upon the verdict of posterity. The verdict of posterity, he would philosophically explain over his pipe and

pot, was, in its relation to art, merely the judgment of a set of people removed by one or more degrees farther from the great lights of antiquity than we ourselves, and who were, therefore, less qualified to give an opinion. All that was best and greatest, lay in the past; and though the present might not be a great age—indeed, he had very little belief in its being so—yet, it was only reasonable, by the argument of analogy, to suppose it would be superior to the future. Why, then, make such a fuss about posterity? The fact was, that in Mr. Pelter's eyes, posterity was but the next generation of picture-dealers. For his own works, he had no ambition; no desire for fame, and very little even for profit; but for those of his friend he allowed himself some hopes. He liked the young fellow dearly, and had a genuine admiration for his talents, which he wished to see made use of to the best advantage. Perhaps he had a secret conviction that he had missed his mark in the world, and was solicitous that Walter should have better fortune.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ACADEMY CIRCULAR.

I ONCE knew a very clever but paradoxical man who was wont to explain that, upon the whole, the British House of Peers were created from personal merit : his line of argument I forget, and, indeed, though urged with great ingenuity, it was somewhat difficult to follow even when in process ; but I am nearly sure that genuine conviction animated it, until he became a peer himself ; after which, modesty, or perhaps some innate sense of humour (in which I had always thought him deficient), sealed his lips upon that subject. There is a natural and wholesome desire on the part of the public to believe such things. I very much question whether nine people in ten do not entertain the delusion that a silk gown (for example) is an honour conferred upon barristers for eminence in their profession : I am quite sure that it would shock them to hear, that for every Victoria Cross that is given for valour, half-a-dozen are applied for in vain. Folks in the country even believe that pictures are accepted or rejected in the Royal Academy every year solely upon their own merits ; that the Hanging Committee know nothing about them ; that they are sent in without name or address, and simply with a motto—like the poems that compete for the Newdigate or the Chancellor's medal—and are adjudicated upon without any personal reference to the artists. And yet these good people would be quite insulted if you inquired if they believed in the Millennium.

Walter Litton knew very few R.A.'s, and none who were upon the Hanging Committee of that year. No member of it was inveigled into the second floor in Beech Street, and persuaded to cast his eye upon "Supplication," in order that, when he saw it again upon a certain momentous occasion, recognition might follow. Jack Pelter would have done him that good turn—for he was one of those who will do for a friend what "wild horses" would not have compelled him to do for himself—but Walter declined the offer.

"My dear Jack," said he, "you are most kind; but I would rather the thing stood on its own hook."

"I want it to hang on the Line," was Jack's only rejoinder.

"Well, I hope it will, or, at all events, somewhere. It may be very foolish of me, and very sanguine, but I have great confidence——"

"In the committee?" broke in Pelter. "Then you must be very foolish and very sanguine indeed."

"No; in the merits of the picture."

"Gad, how I wish I was your age!" sighed Jack. "Do you think it will be bought for the nation?"

"I don't wish it to be bought at all."

"Oh, I see; you want to keep it for your diploma picture."

But though Jack was thus cynical with his friend, he had a high opinion of the excellence of this particular piece of work over which Walter expended a prodigious amount of time and pains. His usual habit was to tire of his productions. He was by no means a careless worker, but ere he had finished one picture, his mind had begun to be busy with its successor. He always deemed his last work his best, of course, but his last would be nothing to that which was to follow it; the germs of which *chef-d'œuvre* were already sprouting in his brain. But with "Supplication," the case was different. Every detail was wrought up to the highest pitch of perfection of which he was capable, and he was never tired of touching and retouching them; he did not retouch the face, either because he was satisfied with it, or because he distrusted his ability to effect improvement, but he would fix his eyes upon it for long intervals with the intensity of an intending buyer. Then he would look up with a sigh, and busy himself with the embroidery of Queen Philippa's robe, or with the colour of the cushion upon which she knelt. He would even do this when his model was in the room, forgetful of her presence, and of the money per hour it cost him; and upon one or two occasions, he noticed that she also had her fits of abstraction. Then it struck him that her face had grown paler of late, and her large eyes less lustrous, and his tender heart reproached him for his indifference.

"We have been working very hard at this picture, have we not, Red Riding-hood?" said he kindly. "Don't you think you would be the better for a little holiday?"

"Not so far as I am concerned, sir. I am not at all tired."
"You look so," returned he, regarding her in really quite a paternal way; "very fagged and out of sorts. Are you quite sure you are well?"

"Yes, sir; I am well enough."

"But you may not be a good judge of that. I shall go round this afternoon, and speak to your father about you, little one."

"Oh, pray, sir, don't speak to him!" returned she with sudden vehemence. "Indeed, indeed, there is nothing the matter with me—nothing, at least, to speak of. There is no need for any holiday. Besides, father has bills to pay, which were not settled at Christmas, and it would vex him if I fell out of work just now."

"Oh, I daresay we can manage about the bills. You have been one, two, three, four months eternally kneeling upon that cushion; and, so far as this picture is concerned, I can get on very well by myself now. Yes, yes; you must have a holiday."

"As you please, sir," answered Nellie humbly; "that is, so far as the sittings are concerned. Indeed, I have felt that I have been picking your pocket for the last six weeks."

"Picking my pocket, Red Riding-hood! Why, how was that?"

"Well, sir, I have seen that I was of little or no use. You don't know how absent and thoughtful you have become; I might just as well have been at home as in your studio, for all the good I have been to you for this last hour, for instance. And then the picture isn't like me, not a bit. It was at first, perhaps, just a little; but you have been thinking of somebody else all along, and been painting her instead of me."

The colour rose to the very roots of Walter's hair, but he answered laughingly: "And has that offended you, Red Riding-hood, all along?"

"No, sir; indeed, I didn't notice it at first. But it seems wrong that I should come here and take your money, when you could get on just as well without me."

"And that's what makes you look so pale and sorrowful, is it? You must certainly have a very tender conscience. However, let me tell you, for your comfort, Red Riding-hood, that I can *not* get on without you. I have got used to you as a sister, and when folks have come to the age of your grandmamma,

they are averse to change. Perhaps you have sat long enough for Philippa ; but you have plenty of expressions beside that pleading one, which you have worn so long, that I do believe it has made you down-right miserable. Mr. Pelter has recommended me to take the game of Forfeits for a subject, which will require you to be full of fun ; and, after a month or two of that, I shall expect you to be in tearing spirits."

When Walter and his friend were smoking their pipes that evening, the former spoke of his model's altered looks, and of the talk he had had with her. "I could make nothing of it, except that she must really have taken it to heart that the picture is not a portrait. I wish you would take her for a bit, Jack, and put her in good spirits."

"I am doing a veteran in boots and a beard," said Pelter dryly ; "and I should recommend you to paint a veteran for your next picture—Miss Nellie's great-aunt, for instance."

"Nonsense ! I am really serious in asking your opinion, for I am sure the girl is out of sorts about something ; not ill, I think, but wretched in her mind. What the deuce can be the matter with her ?"

"I am afraid Red Riding-hood's grandmamma is turning out to be a wolf, in spite of herself, Walter."

"I don't understand you, Pelter."

"Don't you ? It's a very old story, my good fellow. I don't for a moment imagine you want to devour her, mind, though she would be a dainty morsel for some people. But I have a suspicion she wants to be eaten."

"You don't mean to say that the girl has fallen in love with me ?"

"I am not sure ; but there is no accounting for tastes, and she may have done so. I am glad, for her sake, at all events, that you are a gentleman—and not a man of honour."

"I hope not, indeed, in the sense you mean," answered Walter, reddening. "But it seems to me your view is a very coxcombical one."

"It would be, if I had suggested she had fallen in love with me," returned Jack. "But that she has fallen in love with somebody, is certain : downcast eyes, pale cheeks, and sighs, are all 'signs,' as old Burton calls them in his *Anatomy*. You will find them there under the head of 'Love a Cause.' Perhaps

she is enamoured of your Apollo, which is as large as life, and very like : such things have happened in the case of statues, so why not with paintings ? If this be so, and since nobody will buy it, you had better give it to her."

"I think what you suggest is quite as likely as that she should have fallen in love with *me*," said Walter gravely ; "but she is certainly very unhappy. After what you have said, I would send her away to-morrow, but that she says her father is so hard up."

"You are too emotional," said Mr Pelter ; "or, in other words, a soft-hearted young fool. Also, I wish you would drink a little fairer. Please to ring for another jug of beer."

As a matter of fact, however, not only had Mr John Pelter had his full share of the beer, but he had no reason to plume himself upon hardness of heart. His general views of his fellow-creatures, like those of most Bohemians, were cynical, but in each particular case he shewed himself no philosopher. Indeed, he could not bear with equanimity the misfortunes of total strangers to him, much less of his friends. He was opposed to beggars upon principle, but often and often would he take some poor pinched creature into his studio, under pretence of his artistic wants, and then dismiss him warmed and filled. To his personal friends he was devoted, and when Litton's picture was in due time sent into the big shop on approval, Jack was far more anxious about its fate than Walter himself. Indeed, Walter exhibited an indifference in the matter, which, considering what the other knew of his character and antecedents, was inexplicable to his friend. He shewed despondency, sitting almost idle for whole days alone—for he had, for the present, dispensed with the services of Nellie Neale—but not those symptoms of solicitude for the success of his great work with which Jack was so well acquainted in other cases. The cause of this was curious, yet by no means unknown in the profession to which he belonged. *He missed his picture.* This is peculiarly an artist's grievance. The novelist can both have his cake and eat it : his book—the writing of which has given him so many hours of pleasure, and with the characters whereof, even though he may have failed in making them real to others, he has been living for months in as close a relationship as with those of his household—remains to him after it is written. But when the

painter has sold his picture, it is gone for ever. The majority of his class may be glad enough to get rid of it, if the price is satisfactory : Pelter was so, and Litton himself had been so hitherto. But now and then, a picture becomes to its creator like a child to its father. The wrench of parting with it, however mitigated by recompense, is as severe as that which Romance attributes to the Arab when parting with his horse. He has seen it grow under his hand in unexpected strength and beauty, out of nothing ; it has been his companion for many solitary hours, whispering to him hopes of fortune and of fame, which, however realized, must needs fall short of its suggestions ; till, though so ineffably ideal, it has become something lifelike. It is sometimes pregnant with Association : reminding him who drew it of some much-loved scene that can never be beheld again, as on that bygone day in which he saw it first ; or, perchance, of some dear one whom death has taken. The heart has more tentacles than the eight-armed demon of the sea, wherewith, like it, it lays hold of things animate or inanimate with dogged clutch ; " it clings, it clings ; " and neither Syren's voice nor Reason's can make it loose its hold. Walter missed his picture, though the face it mirrored haunted him like a ghost ; and would have been well content to hear it was in that academical Vault—the bourne from which all pictures *do* return to their disconsolate owners—so that he might go at once and claim it. It would be found there, doubtless, as other works of his had been, but meanwhile he grudged its absence. He had another picture on his easel, but his heart was not in that, as it had been in its predecessor ; he was equally painstaking, equally conscientious with it, and yet he did not need Jack's ominous silence—his omission to point out its defects—to convince him that it was a failure. At times, so errant was his mind, that he saw both pictures—their lines and hues mingled together, like a dissolving view. Under such circumstances, to paint was useless, and he gave himself up to his own morbid thoughts.

Where was Lotty now ? He had seen nothing of Selwyn for months, nor heard of him, and so far, as he bitterly reflected, that was a good sign. In prosperity, the captain was more likely to forget his friends, than if he had need of them. On the other hand, since he owed him money, he might be

ashamed to come ; they might be very, very poor. He had seen in the paper that Selwyn had sold out of the army, and now he must needs be living on his capital, if his creditors had left him any to live upon. And when that was spent, what could they do then ? To what wretchedness might not that innocent, angelic creature be reduced by this time—and thanks to him ! It had not been Walter's fault, of course, but he reproached himself for not having combated the captain's arguments in the railway carriage in favour of their elopement, nay, with having been in the railway carriage at all, since, but for his presence, Lotty would not have taken that first fatal step of leaving home. At another time he would be full of pity for them both. What right had he to judge the motives of his friend, since he knew for certain only the strength of his temptation, which he acknowledged to himself—his own present feelings, indeed, were an evidence of the fact—was overwhelming. It was harsh in the captain not to have let him visit them in their trouble, since he ought to have known that their poverty would have exacted sympathy and respect, and to what catastrophes might not this false pride impel him ! Surely, surely, he would never permit Lotty to want, through disinclination to apply a second time to his own scanty purse ! At this idea—the picture of that fair young face, white and wan with physical woe—he would start up from his chair, and pace the room like a madman. The very postman's knock, though letters seldom came for the lonely young fellow, would suggest all sorts of hideous apprehensions ; there might be news that Reginald was in prison—he had himself said it was more than probable—and Lotty alone and starving. One day when there had been a letter for the first floor he heard Pelter's loud voice upon the carpetless stairs, exclaiming : “ Oh, this is for Mr. Litton,” and then his friend's heavy tread coming up-stairs three steps at a time. Jack knew something, though by no means all, of his solicitude upon the young couple's account, and sympathised with it. He stood now at the open door, with a very grave face, and, in a solemn tone, exclaimed, “ Walter, here is a letter for you. I have opened it by mistake.”

“ A letter,” said Walter ; his hand shook as he held it out for the missive. “ No bad news, I hope, of—of Selwyn ? ”

"No ; its only a circular—a circular from the Academy, my lad," cried Jack with a joyous whoop. "It's to tell you that Wednesday is Varnishing Day, and therefore, that your 'Supplication' has been accepted."

Then his two great hands seized Walter's, and wrung them in expressive silence.

"I am not a good one at congratulatory speeches, Watty, old fellow, but I am downright glad."

O blessed time of Youth and Friendship, O happy hand-clasps, only second to the first kiss of Love ; what glories must be beyond the gates of the grave that shall recompense us for your loss !

CHAPTER IX.

A FIRST BID.

IF the painter, as we have shewn, is in one point at a disadvantage, as compared with the author, in another he is much more fortunate. "The Exhibition," as the annual show at the Royal Academy, notwithstanding its many rivals of the same name, is still called, is an institution that in literature has no parallel, and which is of the greatest possible benefit to the young artist. Of course, true merit will make its way in the end in any calling ; but a man may write the best book in the world, and even publish it (though that is not so easy to one unknown and poor), and yet be some considerable time before he can persuade the world to read it ; but when a painting has once got admittance within the Academy walls, all has been done for it in the way of introduction to the public that it can possibly need. The art critics may praise it or let it alone ; it may be hung well or ill, and a great grievance is made (by those who have not much confidence in their own work) in the latter case ; we have even known a young gentleman, on Varnishing Day, so dissatisfied with the position of his picture, that he cut it out of its frame ; but still, so long as it is not hung with its face to the wall, all that have eyes can see it. He that has painted it, if it be worthy, has got his foot set on the first round of the ladder of Fame. There is nothing, I repeat, to be compared with this, in the way of opportunity, in the sister art of literature. I may have my essay, my story, my poem, in the leading magazine, for instance, but people do not take up the leading magazine in such numbers as crowd the great rooms in Piccadilly, nor does the "taking it up" always involve the reading of it. Whereas, folks come to the picture-gallery to see the pictures, and especially, in many cases, to have the credit of discovering some embryo genius, who has no influence with the papers, and of whom they may say, at the spring dinner-parties : "By-the-bye, did you happen to see that exquisite

little thing called 'Supplication' in the right-hand corner of Room 5?" And if you didn't, you will not escape hearing about it.

So young Walter Litton had really cause to congratulate himself in that the gallery gods had relaxed their brows, and resolved to hang, instead of banishing him, as before. Had such a stroke of good-fortune happened to him in the previous year, it would have rejoiced him exceedingly; he would have felt it to be the very accolade of his knighthood, a most refreshing spray from the fountain of all honour. But now, matters were very different with him; Fame had ceased to be his deity; and the news that his friend had brought him was hailed rather because it was not that other news which he had feared to hear, than upon its own account, as a relief rather than a triumph. Still, he was glad his friend was glad, and that the event had justified his praise of his handiwork. It was a pleasure to him, if not the great joy he had expected, to make one of that fortunate band on Varnishing Day, and to feel his foot on the ladder—not of Fame, but of the steps that it was necessary for him to use, to give the last touches to "Supplication," *nee* "Philippa." It was hung a long way up, but yet, he was not dissatisfied. He did not fear its being overlooked—or, rather, underlooked; not from vanity, though he had a good opinion of its merits, but simply because it so riveted his own eyes that he could not understand its escaping those of others. He was almost glad that his friend had sent nothing to "the Big Shop" that year, so that he could contemplate it quite alone. He had acquaintances, of course, equally fortunate with himself, who passed with their friendly comments upon it; but they gave him little pleasure. He cared for no approbation, no notice of it, save from one person, who in all probability would never see it. It was to the last degree improbable that Mrs. Selwyn should visit the Royal Academy; Reginald, he knew, cared nothing for art, and, besides, had no shillings to throw away on such an expedition. Upon the whole, he hardly knew whether he was better satisfied that the picture had been accepted than he would have been to have had it back again in his own chamber, to contemplate it at his leisure. For he did not, as many young painters do, haunt the spot where it hung; not from any fear of adverse criticism, or neglect but because re-

marks upon it of any sort would, he felt, have been painful to him. The subject was sacred to him, in a sense that does not often affect young gentleman-painters—nor old ones, for that matter—who “go in” for sacred subjects.

Whether “Supplication” was really a good picture or not, this present writer, who is, he confesses, one of those ignorant Philistines who only knows what he likes, must be excused from positively asserting. “If you want to know whether a diamond is a good one,” said an eminent R. A. in my hearing, “you go to a jeweller for his opinion; and if you want to know whether a painting is good or bad, you must go to a painter for the information: to buy one upon your own responsibility is an act of madness; to pass your opinion upon it, is an impertinence.” I am therefore silent (except that I venture to express a wish that Literature stood upon equally lofty ground with Art) upon the merits of “Supplication.” The newspapers were silent also, greatly to Mr John Pelter’s disgust, with the exception of a few lines of praise that he himself got inserted in the *Art Critic*, and the inspiration of which Walter immediately detected, though he did not say so, for his friend’s sake. It annoyed honest Jack immensely that there seemed so little chance of seeing that red star in the corner of Litton’s picture which has lit up the despondent gloom of so many a young painter, and made his darkness day. After the first month, most pictures that are fated to sell, are sold; and more than a month had passed since early May. Some weeks after this date, notwithstanding, there came a letter to Walter one evening—when the two friends were together as usual—from the Academy official, to ask what price he had put upon his picture; and this, after a moment’s hesitation, he placed in Pelter’s hand.

“Well better late than never, my lad,” cried the latter joyfully. “This is as it should be. I had begun to think that all the world was blind.”

“They have not seen with your kind eyes, Jack,” said the other gravely; “that is all.”

“Well, they see now, and that’s something,” answered Pelter impatiently. “But why does this bungling fellow write to *you*, instead of telling the man or the woman—for I’ll take two to one it’s a woman. There’s true religion in that picture, Walter, I don’t mind telling you, now that you have found a purchaser.

It's some woman with good eyes in her head, and a good heart, and, I hope, a good balance at her banker's, who wants it. Well, I say, why didn't the fellow tell her your price at once?"

"Because he didn't know it," said Walter quietly.

"Not know it! Why, didn't you fix it a hundred pounds yourself?"

"No, Jack; that was your price, not mine. I didn't mention any price; indeed, as I told you long ago, I don't think I care to sell it."

"Not sell it! Then why the deuce did you paint it?"

To paint a picture without the intention of getting rid of it, and as soon as you could, was, in Jack's eyes, the act of a lunatic.

"I painted it for my pleasure."

"Oh, did you, begad? Then you are nothing better than an amateur." The epithet had the same force with Mr. Pelter as though he had called a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England a ranter. "Of course, you can do as you please, if you are rich enough. You can paint a dozen pictures, and hang them up in your room, so that wherever you turn you can see yourself, as it were, in your own looking-glass. One may be as vain as one pleases, or anything else one pleases, if one is rich. And yet, I thought I heard you the other day complaining about shortness of cash; to be sure, it did not affect yourself, but only stood in the way of what was, after all, perhaps a Quixotic scheme of benevolence, in connection with an old cobbler——"

"I am not rich, my dear fellow," interrupted Walter gravely; "but when a man spends everything upon himself, as I once heard you observe, he can make a little money go a good way."

"I didn't say it of *you*," growled Pelter, touched with the other's resolute good-humour.

"No; I am sure you didn't, though, for that matter, I am just as selfish as other people. You are quite right in suggesting that I cannot afford to keep my pictures in general for my own delectation, nor even, perhaps, this particular one; and yet I do propose for once to indulge myself in the luxury. If you ask me why——"

"Not I!" struck in Jack savagely. "I am not a woman, that I should wish to pry into any man's secrets."

"There is no secret," said Walter hastily; "it is perhaps, after all, but a foolish sentiment."

"Of course it is. I know that much without your telling me," answered the other contemptuously. "But you will find such sentiments costly even for a rich man. What will they think of you at the Big Shop, when it is understood you do not wish to sell your pictures? They will say that it is occupying a space that might be better used; that you are taking the bread out of some poor man's mouth; and they will—for once—be right."

"I wish I had never sent the picture there at all," sighed Walter. "I don't mean that your advice, Jack, wasn't wise as well as kind," added he quickly, laying his hand on the other's arm; "but I never thought this would have happened—that anybody would have wanted to buy it."

"Well, I never like talking about what I don't understand, so we'll say no more about it."

By the last post that night, there came another letter for Walter.

"There's a second appeal to your hard heart," said Jack, who had by no means recovered his usual equanimity; he was exceedingly annoyed by Litton's determination not to sell his picture, which he ascribed to morbid vanity, "If it's from the Trustees of the National Gallery, I do hope you will re-consider your objections."

"It is not from the Academy," said Walter scrutinising the envelope attentively. "It seems to me a lady's hand."

"Then I'll be off," replied Pelter, not sorry for once to leave the society of his friend. "I hope it is not from Nellie Neale, to announce to her grandmamma her intention of committing suicide, for love of her venerable relative. I saw her yesterday, as I passed her father's stall, and she looked ill enough and wretched enough for anything. What with his Red Riding-hoods, and his pictures that are not to sell," growled Jack, as he descended to his own den, "I believe the lad is half-cracked."

At any other moment, this reference to Nellie Neale's altered looks would have aroused Walter's keenest sympathy, but as it was, the words fell almost unheeded upon his ear. The idea had suddenly seized him that the note which he held in his

hand was from Lotty herself, wrung from her, perhaps, by some extremity of poverty or sorrow. It was to the last degree unlikely that she should write to him, but it was possible ; and if she had done so, her need must be great indeed. He had witnessed her signature on the occasion of her marriage, and her handwriting was something like that in which the address of the note was written. Still, all women write alike. Moreover, there was a sort of typical initial upon the envelope—a Bee—which could scarcely have been adopted by her husband : if he had chosen anything characteristic for such a purpose—which was in itself highly improbable—it ought rather to have been a Butterfly, that is, if that insect's name had begun with an S. Upon the whole, this surmise of Walter's almost bore out Mr. Pelter's indignant conjecture that his friend was not quite in his right mind, for, absurd as it was, it agitated him excessively. He tore the Bee all to pieces in his trepidation, and not until his eye had run to the signature, which was totally unknown to him, did he recover his usual calmness. The communication had reference to his picture, after all :

“DEAR SIR—I wish to know what price you have put upon your picture entitled ‘Supplication,’ 2940, in the Academy catalogue ? I made inquiries of the clerk in charge, who will doubtless have communicated with you ; but in order that no mistake may occur in the matter, I have ventured to thus address you personally. I am very anxious to become the purchaser of the work in question. Yours obediently,

“ROBERT BURROUGHES.”

The hair was the hair of Esau, *but* the words were unmistakably Jacob's : the name, that is, was a man's name, but the handwriting, and especially the style, were beyond doubt those of a lady. Even Walter, who was by no means well versed in business matters, was struck with the imprudence of the words, “I am very anxious to become the purchaser,” addressed as they were to one who had placed no figure upon his goods. It would have been a very strong temptation to most people to ask a fancy price. Moreover, it was probable that a fancy price might really be paid—or, at all events, that Robert Burroughes was in a position to pay it, since his address was Willowbank,

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Regent's Park, one of those large houses standing in extensive grounds of their own, on the banks of the ornamental water, and which have been the envy of so many Londoners, as combining in them the advantages both of town and country. Burroughes, it is true, was a very common name, but very common people are often uncommonly rich. If, instead of asking a hundred pounds, he were to ask double the money, it was quite possible he would get it. And two hundred pounds, as Walter confessed to himself, would be very useful to him. The fifty pounds he had lent to Selwyn, he never expected to see again, nor even wished to do so—except so far as its repayment would have been proof of his friend's prosperity; but the loan had left the balance at his banker's very low, so low, that he had not re-engaged Red Riding-hood's services for several weeks, though he really had had occasion for them, and, what was more, felt she needed the money. As to what Pelter had said about her falling in love with him, the more he had thought of it, the more ridiculous the notion had appeared to him. Nellie was an excellent sitter, and used to his ways, and he was fully determined to employ her again, when he should be once more in funds. Yes, two hundred pounds would set him up for the next six months very comfortably; he might ask this Mr. Burroughes for even more, perhaps. But Walter's conscience was still young and tender: he did not even reason, as he might fairly have done: "I put a fancy price upon this picture myself, and therefore it is only just that I should charge another in the same proportion." He thought that, since two hundred pounds was double its fair market value, as assessed by Pelter, who knew the price of things, and was certainly not likely to under-value his friend's production—he ought not to ask a greater sum for it; and yet he did not feel inclined to give up the gratification of possessing the picture for that sum. He might, it is true, put such a price upon it as was prohibitory, and which his correspondent would understand as such; but that course had too strong a flavour of conceit—of "bumptiousness," as Jack would call it—to recommend itself to him. Finally, he sat down, and wrote a note, acknowledging, in courteous terms, the compliment Mr. Burroughes had paid him, and expressing regret for the trouble to which that gentleman had been put, but explaining that the picture was not for sale.

Then, late as it was, he went out, and posted the letter ; not that he was afraid of being argued out of his determination by his friend, for he was tolerably certain that Pelter had said his last word upon the matter, but because he had doubts of his own firmness, if he should suffer his mind to dwell on so tempting an alternative. He felt that it would be for his happiness to keep the picture, yet also for his disadvantage. His reason told him that he had no right to indulge in such extravagance, his common-sense suggested : " If you must retain this picture, why not take a copy of it, and sell either that or the original to Mr. Burroughes ;" and he feared that their united force might overcome a certain feeling within him, which not only prompted him to keep the painting, but revolted against either it or a copy of it passing into the hands of any one else.

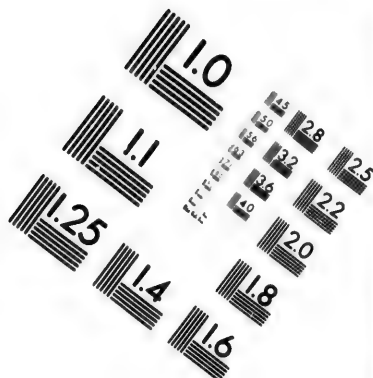
CHAPTER X.

THE UNKNOWN PATRON.

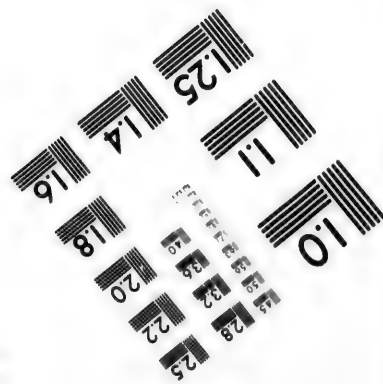


OF the fashion and appearance of Mr. Walter Litton's studio, I have already spoken, though not at length : it was unnecessary to do so, since it was very much like other painting apartments of young gentlemen in his profession who have not as yet found themselves famous. It was dirty and dingy where the light fell upon it, and dirtier and dingier where it did not. The "slavey" in the Beech Street lodging-house had not much time to spare for cleansing operations, and still less inclination for them ; she excused herself for all neglect upon the ground, that "them artists did not like having their things meddled with ;" and she did not run counter to their wishes in that respect. The bedrooms were not much better looked after than the sitting-rooms, with one exception, that of Walter Litton's "was spick and span" as to order and cleanliness, and withal so prettily furnished, that it had obtained, from Mr. John Pelter, the somewhat contemptuous title of "the Bower." But the slavey had little to do with the Bower, which was "looked after" by an occasional retainer of Litton's own—an ancient charwoman, who came in once a week to make "a thorough turn-out," as she expressed it, of that apartment, and to dust its somewhat elaborate furniture.

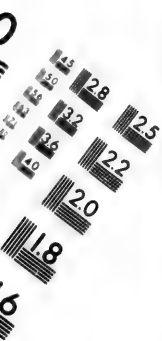
"Mark my words, Litton," Jack once observed, while eyeing superciliously the shining wardrobe, the dressing-table with its snowy covering, and the various little knick-knacks which adorned the chamber of his friend—"you will marry early." He had uttered it in a tone of mournful conviction, as though he had said : "You will die young." He thought that all these things were signs of a domestic turn of mind in Walter, and presages of the matrimonial yoke ; whereas they were perhaps but the result of a longer home experience (short as it had been) than poor Jack had had, and of a university



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education. The contents of Mr. Pelter's studio ran over, as it were, into his sleeping-apartment, in which were to be found various early efforts of his genius, which not even the picture-dealers would regard with any favour, huddled together, like sheep in a storm, with their faces to the wall. Now, Walter's "Bower" did not smack of "the shop" at all: its only pictures were a small portrait of his mother, and two engravings, one of his old college, and one of the Head of that Royal and Religious Foundation, an austere unlikeable man, who had never looked kindly upon the young fellow, nor, indeed, in his own opinion, had had cause to do so, since Litton had "only not disgraced himself" by taking an ordinary degree; but still, for the sake of old times, there the hard old scholar hung. As Walter lay in bed that morning, thinking, his eye lit upon this portrait, and straightway his thoughts wandered to that time, not far back in point of years, and yet so distant from his present, when the work of life had not begun—to those college days, which, to such as he, not striving for collegiate prizes, are a three years' holiday, a time of youth and friendship, such as can never be again. It had been an unreal time perhaps; a world quite different from the great work-a-day one; his judgment had been less mature than it was now; he felt, for instance, that Jack Pelter had more true grit in him, more bottom under the rough rubble than perhaps any of his then companions; but some of them had been very bright and dear to him, one of them especially; a man not dear to him now: he felt that, in spite of himself, though he was neither envious nor jealous of him. He had never had much respect for Reginald Selwyn, but respect had not been so necessary a component of friendship as it had become now; he had loved him as an elder brother, without the insight into his character that such consanguinity compels. All that was over now; and why? He did not answer that question to himself, although he put it; but his thoughts somehow wandered back to the subject they had started from, and which had even mingled with his dreams—his picture in the Academy. There was a bare space on the walls of his little room, above the fireplace, and he now made up his mind that there it should be hung. He would not sell it, even if the chance of doing so should once more offer itself, which was very unlikely. On the whole,

he did not regret that note he had posted overnight to Mr. Burroughes of the Regent's Park. He heard his friend splashing in his bath in the room below, and afterwards whistling, as his custom was, over his careless toilet. Jack's good-humour had doubtless returned to him long ere this, but still he would say nothing to him about that tempting offer. He would keep his own counsel, and let him suppose the letter had been a *billet-doux*, a dun, a challenge—what he pleased, in fact, so long as his guess was wide of the mark. When, however, he descended as usual to breakfast with his friend, and found him frank and hearty as ever, his conscience smote him for his reticence; he had, it is true, already one secret of his own, into which Jack had not been permitted to look—namely, his tenderness for Lotty—but that was an affair as private, and almost as sacred, as his prayers; whereas this offer for his picture he felt to be almost a common property between them, for, without Jack's advice, he would never have sent it to the Academy at all: they had consulted together over it, both as to its price and its merits, and not a few of the latter had, he confessed to himself, been owing to the other's suggestions. A certain sense of ingratitude, and also the knowledge that there was something about which they could not converse, weighed upon Walter's spirits, and he was not himself that morning. It was quite a relief to him to escape from Jack, and find himself in his own room alone. And yet he was not at ease even there; the same almost feminine tenderness of disposition that had caused him to retain his picture for the sake of the associations connected with it, gave him pain, because of his treatment of his friend. He could not set to work as usual. To some, it may seem easy for a painter to do this under any circumstances; an author, it may be thought, whose mind is troubled, is likely enough to be incapacitated from employing his mind in composition; but a painter can have no such excuse. And this is probably true enough of a painter who is also a glazier. But the work of the artist—and Walter Litton, though his talents were immature, and often misdirected, was a true artist—is not mechanical, although he labours with his hands. If he had had a model before him, he could perhaps have compelled his own attention to the canvas, but as it was, it was distracted by other thoughts: he made up his mind that he would call at

the cobbler's that very day, and engage Red Riding-hood, if, indeed, she was well enough to resume her sittings. He could not quite recall what Pelter had said about her, though he knew there was something wrong. His whole mind was confused and jaded, and incapable of effort. Perhaps it was that glass of malt liquor, which, contrary to his habit, he had taken after breakfast that morning, for the sake of good-fellowship, and to make up to his beer-drinking friend for other shortcomings. At eleven o'clock the slavey brought him a letter—not on a silver salver, genteel reader, but in her damp red hand—and she grinned as she delivered it: like the last, it was in a lady's hand, but it was not on that account that she grinned, for she did not know one handwriting from another.

"Why, I never heard the postman's knock, Jenny," said Walter kindly.

"It tain't the postman," said she, stuffing the end of her apron into her mouth, to stifle a giggle; "it be an ever-so-big footman, with a white head with an illigant split in it, and a bell-rope at his shoulder."

"That's called a shoulder-knot, Jenny. Ah, very good"—he had rapidly cast his eye over the contents of the letter—"tell him to wait, and I will write an answer."

His tone was careless, but the note had, in fact, surprised him very much. It came from the same address as before, and was in the same hand:

"DEAR SIR," it began—"I am in receipt of your letter, in which you state that your picture is not for sale. At the risk of being deemed impertinent, I write to you once more to express a hope that you may be induced to reconsider this decision. That the work is very meritorious as a painting, I have no doubt; but its artistic merits, if I may say so without offence, are its least attraction in my eyes; I have quite another reason for wishing to possess it. It is difficult, impossible, indeed, to explain this by letter; but if your resolve not to part with it is capable of change, I would earnestly entreat you to give me a few minutes' conversation upon this subject. I am confined to my house by a severe attack of gout, or I would do myself the honour of calling on you; but as that is impossible, might I ask the favour of your looking in on me, at any hour you

please to name—this day, if possible? The bearer will await your reply.

“Yours faithfully,
“ROBERT BURROUGHES.”

The gout from which this gentleman was suffering was certainly not in his hand, for the writing was firm and distinct, though very feminine in its character. Walter felt so curious about the whole affair, that he had almost a mind to summon the ever-so-big footman with the bell-rope, and question him about his master; but such a proceeding would, to say the least of it, have been undignified. Jack had often warned him never to express surprise with respect to any application for a picture, “however much and naturally you may be yourself astonished at it.” Of course, if he was obstinately resolved not to part with this one, he had simply to pen a few words to that effect, and there was an end to the matter. But he did not wish to act so abruptly; partly, because it seemed rude to do so, but still more because he had a strong desire to have this mystery solved. It was not very flattering to find that his *chef-d’œuvre* was not in demand on account of its own merits, and yet that “quite another reason” so excited his curiosity that he scarcely felt the wound to his self-love. Nay, he even felt some sympathy with Mr. Robert Burroughes, in that he felt his own affection for the picture did not rest upon the ground either of its conception or execution; but upon something else, albeit, that something could not be common between them. At all events, he resolved to see this would-be patron, and to be civil to him, though he by no means made up his mind to let the picture go. There might be something in it, which had struck Mr. Burroughes’s fancy, that was capable of repetition, and this might procure him an order for another work. Though he had been so self-willed and obdurate in this particular affair, Walter was not blind to his own interests in a general way, nor less desirous of making his way in the world than any other young fellow. So he wrote a polite note to say that he would do himself the pleasure of calling at Willowbank that afternoon, at three o’clock, and despatched it by the white-headed footman.

Then a sudden impulse moved him to run down stairs and place both the letters of Mr. Burroughes in the hands of faithful Jack, and he obeyed it.

"My dear Watty," said the other, looking not at them, but at him, with his kind eyes, "are you sure you are right about this? You are not going to make me your confidant, I hope, because you think I am huffy and vexed with you? That is all over and gone, as far as I am concerned."

"I daresay I seemed foolish and impracticable," answered Walter, "but I really had my reasons."

"And, very likely, sufficient ones, my lad. I don't say that your resolution to keep your picture was no business of mine, for what concerns you must needs concern me, but I feel that I was dictatorial about it."

"Not a bit, Jack. Please don't say another word about it."

"But these letters—there are some things, Watty, you know, that one should not tell even to one's friends, for the sake of others—are you sure I have a right to see them?"

"Certainly you have, since I give them to you. It's the funniest thing that ever happened, you will say."

"Are they from a woman, Watty?" inquired Jack, still hesitating.

"Not they, though the handwriting looks like it. They're all about that picture, from a Mr. Robert Burroughes."

Jack read them carefully, but without the smile that Walter had expected to see illumine his jolly face.

"There's something wrong here, my lad," said he gravely. "These letters are not from a man, in my opinion; they're from a woman; and she doesn't want your picture at all."

"What the deuce does she want, then? You don't mean to say that she wants *me*!—that she has fallen in love with your humble servant, as you always said little Red Riding-Hood would do! You will make me a coxcomb." Walter was not a coxcomb, but he did remember how Selwyn had said: "My aunt has fallen in love with you," on his first meeting with that lady, and also the attention she subsequently paid to him at Penaddon.

"No, Walter; I don't seriously think Miss Nellie has done that, although I fear there is something amiss with her in that way; and if she were, the misfortune would be almost wholly on her side; but if this—this communication should be what I suspect it is, the misfortune would be on your side."

"You must have been reading the adventures of Mr. Tom Jones, or Mr. Gil Blas, of late, Jack."

"No; but I have been reading human nature—though not the best side of it, perhaps—for more years than you have. I could tell you a story of real life that mates with that of the Lady Clara Vere de Vere of your favourite poet; only with a difference. I could tell you, I say"—and here Jack began to pace the room with rapid strides—"of a young fellow still in his teens, for whom a great lady once entertained a great passion. Perhaps she would have married him if she could; perhaps she only persuaded him that such was her desire. She wrote to him, sometimes by the post, sometimes by just such a wonderful footman as I saw here in our passage this morning; she invited him to her house. She flattered, fondled, spoilt him. He was a lad like yourself, ingenuous, high-spirited, with a future—a great future, as he thought, poor devil—before him. She was older than he, though she did not look it, and she had more than twice his wits. It was an unequal match in more senses than one, and the weaker one went to the wall. There are some things, as I have just said, that it is well for a man to be silent about, even to his best friend, but I will tell you this much—that woman ruined the lad. He did not cut his throat, you understand, like 'young Lawrence'—it would have been better for him, perhaps, if he had—but he lost all he had, his heart, his hopes, his faith: she killed him."

"He is dead, then?" said Walter gravely.

"Yes, boy; he died years and years ago, God help him! It is not a pleasant story," continued Pelter, after a pause; but I have told you it, because I don't want you to perish in the same pitfall. Of course, I may be all wrong in supposing that there is any risk. Most people will laugh at such a danger, which seems to them imaginary, will call it ridiculous, impossible, and the like; and perhaps it would have been impossible in their case; but most people are fools. Such things, it is true, don't happen often; but they do happen."

It would have been easy for a much duller man than Walter Litton to perceive that Pelter had been speaking of himself: his bitter excited tone, his looks, his very gait, as he walked hastily to and fro, as if impatient of the folly he described, betrayed it.

But for this, Walter himself would have ridiculed the story, and did ridicule it even now, so far as it had application to his own position. That Mr. Robert Burroughes should turn out to be a middle-aged lady of high rank, who had fallen in love with him, unknown to himself, tickled his sense of humour; if it was so, it seemed to him that the Bee (and it was a very large one) impressed upon her envelopes was also in her bonnet—that she must be mad."

"But you would not wish me to cancel my appointment at Willowbank?" inquired he, and his eye twinkled with fun in spite of himself, "for I have made one for three o'clock."

"Of course not. But remember my story, and forget, please, that it was I who told it."

"I will," said Walter, made serious by his friend's unwonted tone, which was at once abrupt and pathetic. It was evident, in this case, good advice *had* cost the giver something.

"No," continued Pelter in his old manner; "I daresay your visit will turn out to be commonplace enough. Mr. Burroughes is, doubtless, only an eccentric old fellow, who takes fancies to pictures, and doesn't care what he gives for them. Your refusal to part with yours has probably whetted his appetite, and may turn out to be the happiest fluke for you."

"Thank you for the compliment. If he had taken a fancy to one of yours, you would not have set it down to his eccentricity, I'll warrant, Mr. Pelter."

And so they parted, not to meet again till just as Walter was starting on his mysterious errand.

"You see, I've got myself up, Jack, to the best of my ability," said he, smiling, "in case Mr. Burroughes should turn out to be a countess."


"Quite right," returned the other dryly. "I have been to the Academy, and the man tells me it *was* a lady who asked the price of your picture; moreover, I have looked in the blue-book, and no such person as Burroughes lives at Willowbank, Regent Park."

"Then, perhaps, after all, it is a hoax," said Walter, with an air of very considerable disgust.

"No, no; that footman could never have demeaned himself by mixing himself up with anything of that sort. I should as soon believe that the Lord Chancellor played leap-frog on the woolsack. Good-bye, and luck be with you."

CHAPTER XI.

BARGAINING.

T a little before three o'clock—for, though an artist, he was punctual, and even methodical, in his habits—Walter Litton presented himself at the lodge-gate of Willowbank. A carriage-drive that wound among a pretty shrubbery just clothed in its first summer tints, so as to suggest the notion of extent to what was—for London—in reality a considerable frontage, led to the entrance-door of the mansion; its principal windows, however, looked upon a smooth, shelving lawn, which sloped down to the water, and was, even at that season, gay with parterres of flowers. To left and right of it were more shrubberies, interspersed with some fine, if not stately trees; nor was there anything to suggest that the place was within miles of the Great Metropolis, except that solemn, far-off roar, which might well be taken for the murmur of the summer sea; so like to it it was, indeed, that, for a moment, Walter's thoughts flashed to Penaddon Hall, where that sound was never unheard; albeit, no two places could, in other respects, be more dissimilar than the Hall and the spot in which he now found himself. *There* the poverty of the tenant had compelled neglect; whereas *here*, the most perfect neatness and completeness that money could insure were evident on all sides. The carriage sweep might have been made of cayenne pepper, so bright and delicate was the gravel of which it was composed; the grass that fringed the laurel beds might have been cut with a razor; and every shrub and flower looked as though it had been the gardener's peculiar care. So rare, too, seemed many of them, that it would not have surprised him if each had had a ticket appended to it, as at Kew, explaining its name and *habitat*. His ring at the front-door was answered by a stately personage of ecclesiastical, nay, episcopal type, who appeared to regard his having come on foot as quite phenomenal. He

looked to right and left of his visitor through the glass door, before he opened it, in obvious search after the usual equipage.

"Is Mr. Burroughes within?" inquired Walter, not a little amused by this expressive pantomime.

"Mr. Burroughes?" repeated the man in a doubtful tone.

"Then it is a hoax," thought Walter. "Yes, I received a letter this morning," said he aloud.

"O yes, sir; it's quite right," interrupted the other, as if recollecting himself. "Mr. Litton, I believe? My master is expecting you."

He led the way through a hall of marble, in which stood two colossal vases of great beauty, and some statues of life-size, which Walter's hurried glance perceived were of no mean merit, into a sitting-room looking on the lawn, and then withdrew. It was a small apartment, but very richly furnished, and to those with whom newness is not a bar to admiration, in excellent taste. The walls were lined with books, in bright but not gaudy bindings; the floor was of polished oak, and bare, except in the centre, which was covered by a rich carpet, in which the feet sank as in luxuriant moss; the furniture was also of oak, but of the most modern—that is, of the comfortable make. Next the window was a table rather out of character with its surroundings, for, though of polished and well-kept appearance, it was, in fact, a plain office desk of deal, such as a merchant's clerk might work at in the City. It was laden, however, with accessories, whose splendour was greatly in excess of their use; in particular, upon a golden tripod were a watch, a weather-glass, and a thermometer, all made of the same precious metal. The singularity of this ornament attracted Walter's attention, and upon the foot of it he read inscribed along with the date of a few months back, the words, "To our dear Papa, upon his Birthday."

"Good heavens," murmured Walter to himself, "perhaps there are *two* countesses!"

At that moment the door opened, and there limped in a short, stout man, by no means so important-looking as the butler, but with an air of proprietorship, nevertheless, about which there could be no mistake. "Mr. Litton, I believe?" said he, without offering to shake hands. "Be so good as to take a seat;" and he himself, not without difficulty, and much help from his

stick, contrived to get into an arm-chair. His face was flabby rather than fat, with very little colour, and shewed signs more of care than thought; his tone was peevish, and his manner somewhat uneasy, not such as is usually worn by a man of great substance in his own house.

"You have come about that picture in the Academy?"

"I have; or, rather, you requested me to come about it, Mr. Burroughes," answered Walter with some dignity.

"Well, well; it is all the same. I am not Mr. Burroughes, however; my name is Brown—Christopher Brown." And the little man drew himself up stiffly, as though the name ought to be an impressive one.

Walter did not remember to have heard of the name, and he resented this behaviour of its proprietor extremely. "I can only deal with principals," said he, his indignation leaving him no choice of words, and causing him to use a conventional phrase, which had really but little meaning, and of which he repented immediately. The reply, however, seemed to please his companion well enough.

"That's a very sensible observation, young man, and shews you have some knowledge of business. However, I *am* the principal in this case; Mr. Burroughes is the Co., and of no consequence. It is I who wish to buy your picture. You don't seem to be in a hurry to part with it—that is very sensible too. We are never in a hurry to part with anything in the City—if we can help it. That is what we call 'standing out.'"

Walter bowed stiffly; he was not quite sure what the stout gentleman meant, but he had a strong suspicion that he was drawing a parallel between Art and sordid Trade.

"I do not quite comprehend your meaning, Mr. Brown."

"I mean—this question resolves itself, I suppose, like all other questions, into those two pregnant words, *How Much?*"

"Not quite," returned Walter coldly. "If that had been the case, I should have named my price for the picture, and then you might have taken it or left it, as you chose."

"You must be in independent circumstances, young man," observed the other sarcastically. "And yet Beech Street is not a very highly rented locality, I believe."

"Perhaps not; and yet, if you visited me in Beech Street, I should behave to you like a gentleman, sir," cried Walter, seizing his hat.

"Highty, tighy ! Don't fly into a passion, Mr. What s-your-name ; I didn't mean to offend you. Sit ye down, sit ye down, and let us discuss this matter in a quiet, sensible manner."

"I had rather stand," said Walter ; "thank you."

"Well, well ; as you like. I wish I could stand as well. Come, let us say fifty pounds. You are a young man, a very young man. By George ! I wish I was half as young. You have got your way to make in the world. When I was your age, I didn't get fifty pounds for a week's work, nor yet five. My time was not so valuable."

"Perhaps not, sir," answered Walter hotly, "and I hope it is not very valuable now, since you are wasting it. I wish you a very good-morning ;" and he moved towards the door.

"Why, how much *do* you want ?" cried the old gentleman, slewing round upon his chair so as to face his companions. "I'll give you a hundred pounds. You are certainly not famous enough to refuse a hundred pounds."

"Famous or not," answered Walter in a fury, "you shall not have it for that money ;" and he laid his hand upon the door.

"Stop, sir, stop !" cried the old gentleman. "I have a wish to possess that picture—for a reason that you cannot understand ;" and here his voice sank low. "It is not a matter of money's worth to me."

"I thought everything resolved itself into those two pregnant words, How Much !" answered Walter, scornfully.

"I am an old man, sir, and you are a young one," returned the other ; "perhaps I presumed too much upon that ; in my time, it made a difference. Don't let us quarrel. Your picture may be perfection, for what I know, and you shall have your price for it—that is in reason. My cheque-book lies in that desk ; I will pay you upon the nail—this instant. Come, shall I make it two hundred pounds ?"

"No, sir. You say that you wish to buy the picture for a reason that I could not understand. Well, I wish to keep it for a reason that would at least be equally unintelligible to you."

"I will give you *three* hundred golden sovereigns for that little picture. It cannot be worth more than three hundred pounds."

"It is not worth so much, sir," answered Walter coldly, "and yet I will not sell it you."

"You will not sell it to me!" cried the old man angrily. "Then why did you come here? To insult me, to disappoint me, to——" Here he stopped, then added plaintively: "Young man, you are very cruel." He had a haggard and weary look, which moved the other in spite of his wrath.

"I ought not to have come here, sir, I own," answered he slowly, "since I did not mean to sell my picture. If you had behaved otherwise, or given me your reason for desiring to possess it—no, forgive me"—for across the old man's face here flitted a look of intense pain—"that is an impertinence; I mean, if you had convinced me that the possession of it would have been dear to you, from whatever cause, as it is to me, perhaps I would have parted with it. This surprises you; and yet one gives one's horse or one's dog away, where they are cared for and appreciated, and not otherwise. However, as matters stand, I feel I owe you an apology, an explanation. There is an association—to me—in connection with that painting, which forbids me to part with it for its fair price; and to take advantage of your fancy for it, to extort more, seems to me shameful."

"But if I don't mind it—if money is nothing to me!" exclaimed the old man eagerly. "I don't say it is nothing; three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds to everybody."

"I know it, sir. To me, indeed, it is a very large sum," remarked Walter quietly.

"Well, to be frank, young man, it is to me but a mere drop in the ocean."

"Very likely. Still, to take it from you—since a rich man's whim is his master—would be to trade upon your necessity."

"Nonsense! Wheel that desk here, and let me write out the cheque."

"I would not take it, if it was for three thousand. Good-morning, sir."

Walter opened the door, but as he did so, he felt it pushed toward him, and there entered—Lotty!

"Mr. Litton, I believe?" said she, with a pleasant smile. "Good-morning."

CHAPTER XII.

LILY.

WALTER could scarcely believe his senses, when he beheld thus standing before him the girl, of whom for the last six months the image had been more or less present to his mental vision, but whom, with his physical eyes, he had never thought to see again. To meet her at such a time and place was most unlooked-for and extraordinary ; but still more surprising was it to see her so unchanged in beauty, not bright and radiant, indeed—for that, even on her marriage morning, she had not been ; in the very flush of bridehood her heart had not ceased to be agitated by thoughts of home—but still in good health, her eyes undimmed with tears, her face unlined with cares, her voice as musical and cheery as when he had first heard its well-remembered tones. All this was like enchantment ; but what beyond all astounded him, and stilled his tongue, and seemed to paralyse his very limbs, was the fact that she had not recognised him ; that she had said “ Mr. Litton, I believe ? ” and then, in the most unconcerned, though courteous manner, had added “ Good-morning,” as though he were no more than an utter stranger.

He stood dumb and motionless for a few seconds, staring at her, in her pretty garden costume and summer hat, until the little blush he knew so well crept from her cheek to her white brow.

“ He sees the likeness,” muttered the old man plaintively.

“ To the picture,” replied Lotty quickly. “ Yes, it is very curious. I hope that you have come to terms, papa, with this gentleman.”

“ With this gentleman ! ” repeated Walter to himself, like one in a dream. It was impossible that she did not recognise him ; there must, then, be some reason for her ignoring their acquaintance. Was it possible that that terrible Mrs. Sheldon had breathed to her that shameful imputation of his being at

heart a rival in the affections of her husband, and that hence, she had resolved to know him no more!

She kept her eyes studiously averted from him, and fixed upon her father.

"No," sighed the old man; "we have not come to terms. Perhaps I have mismanaged the affair. Mr. What's-his-name——"

"Litton," suggested Lotty softly.

"Mr. Litton has refused to part with his picture at any price. 'Not,' he said, 'for three thousand pounds.'"

"Excuse me, sir," said Walter; "do not let this young lady imagine me to be extortionate—or mad. Such a sum was never seriously mentioned. On the contrary, I said that the three hundred which you offered was far beyond its worth."

"Then why not take it, sir?" inquired Lotty, looking at him face to face, and speaking in gentle but firm tones. "I wrote to you—at my father's request—to intimate that it was not for the mere merits of the picture—great as they undoubtedly are—that he was desirous of possessing it."

"The note, then, was from you?" said Walter, hardly conscious of what he said.

"Yes; I thought I said that my father was incapacitated from addressing you himself; at all events, it was so; I was his amanuensis. I said, if you had not resolutely made up your mind to keep the picture, we hoped that you would call in person. Since you have done so, it seems unreasonable that you will not accept my father's offers."

"That is right," said the old man approvingly. "You put it better than I did. Listen to her, Mr. Litton."

"My father has an especial wish to possess the painting," continued Lotty decisively, "and it seems to me that, under such circumstances, it is cruel to withhold it. I put it to your sense of honour."

"That is quite unnecessary," answered Walter frigidly.—"Your daughter's arguments have convinced me, sir," said he, turning to the old man. "The picture is yours." He had no longer any desire to retain it, since she, who, if not its original, had been the inspirer of whatever in it had made it dear to him, could treat him with such neglect.

"You are a good fellow!" cried his host triumphantly—

"you are an excellent young fellow !—Wheel up my desk, my dear, and I will give him the three hundred.—And I tell you what, sir, I'll make it guineas."

"Excuse me, sir ; my price is one hundred pounds," observed Walter coldly. "I shall not take a penny more."

"Not a penny more !" cried the old man, holding his pen in the air. "Why, you must be what you called yourself just now—mad ; stark, staring mad."

"That is the just price—the price at which it was assessed by a friend of mine, who is a good judge of such things, when it went to the Academy ; and I shall take no more. Please to write out one hundred pounds."

"I am afraid, papa," said Lotty softly, "that we have offended this gentleman ; and that, therefore, he will not be beholden to us."

"I did not mean any offence, young man," said Mr. Brown. "It seems to me that folks are very sensitive nowadays ; there is no knowing where to have them. I wished to make a fair bargain with you, Mr. Litton ; that is my notion of doing business, and it has served me for the last fifty years ; but I certainly had no intention of ruffling your feathers. Well, there is your hundred pounds."

"O papa !" said Lotty.

"My dear, I have only done as the young gentleman has directed me ; I conclude he knows his own mind."

"You are very right, sir," answered Walter. "The picture shall be sent to you directly the Exhibition is over."

"Very good. I won't offer to shake hands with you, young man, because I can't ; but I am truly obliged to you" (this he pronounced "obleegeed," but in a friendly and even grateful tone). "If the obligation were on your side instead of mine, I should venture to ask a favour of you."

"Pray, ask it, sir," said Walter, "all the same."

"Well, then, stay and dine with us. We are none of your fashionables, who wear white ties and that ; and there are only our two selves." A sort of pathos mingled with his speech, that touched the young fellow. "We dine early—that is, what I daresay you will call early, though I call it late ; the time I used to sup at. My daughter here will shew you about the place in the meantime."

This invitation, which, an hour ago, would have been a temptation against which he would have struggled in vain, had now no charms for him. And yet, he had a mind to accept it, if it were only that it would give him the opportunity of reproaching Lotty for her repudiation of him—for what he no longer hesitated to term her ungrateful behaviour towards him. There was some reason for it, of course; but if it was in consequence of anything that Mrs. Sheldon had said to her, she ought not to have listened to it; and if it was for any cause connected with her father, she surely might have acknowledged his identity to himself, without betraying the recognition to his host.

"I shall be very glad to shew Mr. Litton the garden," said she, in cold but courteous tones: "it is not very extensive, but still, for London——"

"I will stay and dine, with pleasure," interrupted Walter with decision. This woman's hypocrisy was beyond all bearing, and he longed to tell her what he thought about it; that cool "still, for London," of hers, when she was in all probability at that very moment contrasting the place in her own mind with the wild luxuriance of the garden at Penaddon, in which he had walked in her company so often, and not six months ago, was too much for his patience.

"Well, come, that's settled," said the old man, not without some irritation, for it was plain that his invitation had "hung" in the young painter's mind, and Mr. Christopher Brown, of Willowbank, was not accustomed to give invitations that were accepted only with reluctance. "There, take him out, Lily, and shew him the ducks."

Lily! The quiet utterance of that simple name staggered Walter like a thunder-bolt, for it was accompanied by a flash of intelligence that altered all things to his mental vision. This, then, was not Lotty, but Lotty's sister; a twin-sister, without doubt (though she had never mentioned that she was a twin), since even to his eyes there had seemed absolutely no difference between them. The same bright trustful face, that had haunted his dreams, as though an angel had hovered over him; the same delicate features; the same abundance of rich brown hair; the same sweet, gentle voice, that he had thought was without its peer in woman, belonged to both—only tender

gratitude had been lacking, as was natural enough ; it was not to be expected that Lotty's sister should feel towards him like Lotty. Still, it was incomprehensible that even Lily should not have recognised his name.

She led the way out of doors, and he followed her, tongue-tied, stunned by this inexplicable fact. Surely, surely she would now tell him, now that they were alone, that she knew him well by her sister's report, though it had not been advisable to say so before her father, on account of the hand he had had in Lotty's elopement.

"This view from the lawn, Mr. Litton, we think is very pretty," were her first words, spoken in pleasant conversational tones, such as befitted a cicerone who was also his hostess. "Some people object to its looking out upon the Park with its nurserymaids and children, but I am not so exclusive."

"There can be nothing objectionable in seeing people enjoy themselves, I should think," said Walter ; his voice was cold and rather "huffy," but she did not seem to notice that.

"No, indeed," she replied ; "that is quite my opinion : I like to see them, and I flatter myself that we give as well as take, for our garden looks very pretty from that side of the water, though I can't say as much for the house. If you wanted to paint a picturesque residence, you would not choose Willowbank for your model, I am afraid. It is scarcely one's ideal of a dwelling-place."

"It has some good points," said Walter. "I should take them, and reject others ; that is how the 'ideal' is represented, by most artists."

"Is that how you painted 'Supplication !' " said Lily, stopping suddenly, and looking up at him.

They were now on the winding path that fringed the water, and shut out from the view of the house by trees and shrubs.

"Yes," said he, after a moment's hesitation ; "I drew it, that is, partly from memory, and partly from imagination."

"Then there really was an original, was there ?"

"I can scarcely say that ; the person that sat for it was not the person I had in my mind, I think, to judge from what your father said about it, when you entered yonder room, that he at least recognised the original."

"He hinted that it was like myself," said Lily quietly, "though I think that was an outrageous compliment."

"I do not say *that*," said Walter brusquely; "but it is certainly not so like you as it is like your sister."

"Ah, it *was* taken from life, then!" exclaimed she. "I always thought that a likeness such as that could not have been a mere coincidence. It is not so much in form or feature, as in expression, that it so much reminds me of dear Lotty. You have known her, then"—and here she heaved an involuntary sigh—"since her marriage?"

"No, not since, but before it. She must surely have told you how I chanced to be in the train with Selwyn when he went down to Cornwall, and how it all happened?"

"She told me that he had a friend with him, but did not mention his name."

"Why, it was I who gave her away!" said Walter bitterly.

His disappointment and humiliation were so excessive that they could not be concealed.

"You must forgive her," said Lilian gently, "in consideration of her position. Love is a great monopoliser, and leaves little room in us save for the beloved object. Besides, she had a good reason for not mentioning your name; it would have set us, she knew, against you. You would not have been made welcome, for example, in this house, had my father known that it was you that helped to——" Her voice quivered, the tears began to fall. "O Mr. Litton," sighed she, "it was an evil day that took dear Lotty from us!"

"I am grieved, indeed, to hear it," answered Walter gravely. "It was no fault of mine, I do assure you. I may seem to you a culprit, but I am wholly innocent in the matter; indeed, what little I did do, was to dissuade Selwyn. If she told you all, she must have told you that."

"It is done now, Mr. Litton, and cannot be undone," answered Lilian. "But it is better that you should not speak of this to my father. Your picture has touched his heart, and made it more tender towards her who was once his darling, and I am grateful to you on that account; but do not let him know what you have just told me. He might think, perhaps, that you had been set on to do it by—by Reginald."

They walked on together slowly, and in silence; then Lily

spoke again : " You have not seen her since her marriage, you say ; how did you know, then, that she was so changed ? "

This was a question that was not easy for him to answer. He could not tell her that Lotty's supposed misery was constantly presenting itself to him ; that his imagination had been coloured with sadness because of her, and had pictured her to him accordingly.

" I have seen her husband," said he evasively.

" And he told you, did he ? " answered she with a pleased air. " No doubt, he is less indifferent than he seems—not that he is unkind," added she hastily. " Do not suppose that I wish to be hard upon your friend ; only it seemed to me that he did not notice her changed looks."

" Is she much changed ? " asked Walter softly.

" Yes ; greatly changed from what you must remember her before her marriage. She has been—nay, she still is—in sad trouble, banished from her home. Perhaps I ought not to speak of such things," said Lily plaintively, " but my tongue has kept involuntary silence so long and it is so hard to brood and brood over a sorrow, and have none to whom to tell it."

" It is very hard, as I know myself," answered Walter gravely ; " if it is any comfort to you, pray speak to me as to one who has your sister's happiness at heart. I may say so much, I hope, without impertinence ; since though I was acquainted with her for so short a time, and there has been so great an interval since, it was under such circumstances as make acquaintance friendship. It was I who telegraphed to you at the drawing-school from the Reading Station."

" Then you cost me the severest pang, Mr. Litton, that my heart has known," said Lilian, with a shudder. " The sudden shock of it, the terror of the thought, that I had to tell papa of it, and the dreadful, dreadful hour in which I *did* tell him ! " and she hid her face as though to shut out the recollection of another's—Walter pictured to himself Mr. Christopher Brown's, the possessor of an income that could be counted by perhaps tens of thousands, when he first heard that his daughter had run away with a penniless soldier, and pitied her from the bottom of his soul. " You see, Lotty was his favourite," continued she, doubtless in unconscious apology for some outbreak of pa-

ternal wrath ; " and her leaving us stabbed him to the heart. It seemed to him ingratitude as well as rebellion. Dear Lotty herself understands that, as she told me before I was forbidden to see her. Papa's life was wrapped up in us two—in her especially—and when he found she had left him for a stranger. O indeed, he has suffered too ! "

" I have no doubt of that. But is there no chance of a reconciliation between them ? "

" Two days ago, Mr. Litton, I should have said : None whatever. He was very resolute against her ; very angry that I had been to see her ; and forbade me ever to write to her, or to mention her name within his hearing. But yesterday morning, at the Academy, he saw your picture, and I could see he recognised it, though her face was not as he had known it. I had told him how weary and worn she looked, but had not moved him ; but when he saw her on your canvas — "

" Take time, take time," said Walter, kindly, for the girl was sobbing bitterly ; " I would not pain you to recount all this, but that it may be better for your sister's sake that I should hear it ; that I should know how to answer your father, when he comes to question me, as perhaps he will."

" No, no ; he will never speak of it to you or anybody," answered she despondingly ; " but when he comes to possess the picture, when he looks upon it daily, as I shall take care he does, I shall have hopes. That he should have mentioned the likeness in your presence was an unlooked-for tenderness. He loves her still, I know, but he is ashamed to own it. It will be very, very long, I fear, if ever, before he forgives her. O sir, do tell me truly"—she looked up at him with clasped hands and streaming eyes—" is Captain Selwyn a good man ? "

" A good man ? Well, men are not good, Miss Lilian, as ladies are"—he should not have called her by her Christian name, but she looked so pitiful and childlike in her sorrow, that he was moved to do so—" but he is a brave soldier and a gentleman, and such are always kind to women, even when they are not their wives, and how much more when they have given up home and friends and fortune to become their brides. I was at school and college with him, where he was most popular with all of us, and I was his dearest friend."

" Why do you say ' was,' Mr. Litton ? A friend is a friend for ever, is he not ? "

"But Selwyn is proud ; and being poor, as I am afraid he is, he has withdrawn himself from me of late, though I myself am poor enough, Heaven knows. If he were rich, this marriage would have taken place as a matter of course ; he would have been a welcome son-in-law ; and you, the sister of his wife, would never have had these doubts about him."

"That is true, Mr. Litton, and you give me much comfort," answered Lilian gratefully. "I have not felt so hopeful since—since Lotty left us. How dreadful it is that money—or the want of it—should work such ruin !"

"Money is much, Miss Lilian," answered Walter ; "and if not a blessing to those who have it, a sad lack to those who have it not."

"Yet you do not care for money, Mr. Litton, or you would not have returned my father's cheque."

"O yes, I do," replied he, smiling ; "only, other things are as dear to me, or dearer. Besides, though I have but little, I do not need it, as poor Selwyn does."

"Yes, indeed," sighed she ; "they are very poor. She told me, that if it had not been for some small sum advanced them by a friend of Captain Selwyn's—I think it was but fifty pounds—they would have been in absolute want. Oh, is it not terrible to think of that, while I am living here in comfort—splendour ! Don't think harshly of me for it ; I have done what I could —"

"I am sure of that," interrupted Walter earnestly ; "indeed, Selwyn told me so himself."

"Did he ?" answered she eagerly. "I am glad of that. I mean to say, I was afraid he thought I had not done my best ; that I might have parted with—things my father gave me. He does not understand papa, or that such a course would have injured Lotty in the end. As it is, there is some hope—thanks to you for the first gleam of it—that nature is asserting herself within him. He is jealous of my suspecting such a change, but it is at work. This desire to have your picture is evidence of it ; and especially the pains he took to conceal his own part in the matter. It was at his request that I wrote you in the name of Mr. Burroughes—his solicitor—so that you should not discover, in case you were really acquainted with Lotty—that the application came from her father."

"I see," said Walter, thoughtfully, "and I agree with you

that it augurs well. Should all come right by the help of my poor picture, I shall be glad indeed."

"I am sure you will; and you may be proud as well as glad, for never can Art have achieved a nobler end than to restore a daughter to her father."


"If it had but been designed," sighed Walter.

"Nay, but no less the skill," answered Lilian promptly. "It was not only that you remembered Lotty's face, and drew it, but that you portrayed the story of her sorrow, and touched my father's heart with its relation. We are your debtors for that, at all events, and I, for one, shall not easily forget it."

Where was it, and on what occasion, that Walter had once before—and only once—experienced the sensations he felt now—that bliss of grateful acknowledgment; the thrill of a tone more exquisite than any music; the sunshine of a smile more beautiful than Murillo ever painted? At Penaddon, when Lotty had thanked him for his escort and assistance. But with his happiness had mingled then a pain, and now there was no pain, but only happiness. Lotty stood once more before him, or so it seemed, but there was no Reginald to come between them.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COMMISSION.

T the little dinner-party at Willowbank that afternoon, there was not much talk, yet Walter thought that he had never enjoyed so pleasant a meal ; Mr. Brown did his best, though it evidently cost him an effort to play the host, and if his civilities had something of patronage about it, the young painter was in no humour to resent it. The rich man's swelling sense of importance, and decisive manner of laying down the law, as though wealth could confer the power of judging rightly on all subjects, did not even amuse him ; for this old man, the father of Lotty and of Lilian, had awakened a strange interest within him. Lilian, accustomed to be silent in her father's presence, spoke but little, yet all she did say had sense and kindness in it ; when they spoke of art, she exhibited no raptures, such as most women use when they wish to be thought enthusiastic ; nor, on the other hand, did she advance her opinions under cover of that sorry shield of pretended ignorance : " I know nothing about it, you know ; please tell me if I am wrong, &c.," which so often conceals a stubborn conceit. When her father became taciturn, as he often did, she knew how to rouse him from his moody thoughts, by starting some subject pertaining to his own pursuits, and whenever a hitch occurred—some point of difference between host and guest, such as, from the total dissimilarity of their characters, could not at times but arise—she smoothed it away with some graceful jest. It was not without some secret sense of disloyalty that Walter found himself comparing the two sisters with one another, to the disadvantage of the absent one. Lotty had certainly never exhibited such tact and graciousness, but in her case there had been no such opportunity for their display ; she had had no judgments to pass, no opinions to offer, no feelings even to express, except with respect to one person and one object. Perhaps, when Lilian came to be in love, her thoughts would also be

inclosed in the same narrow circle. Since they were so broad and comprehensive, it was probable that she was not in love, and that was, somehow, a very pleasant reflection to Walter. We have all experienced, I suppose—we men—in our time, a satisfaction at feeling confident that the charming young person by whom we are seated for an hour or so, even if we are never to see her again, is, for the present, fancy free ; that she can feel an interest in what we say, if not in ourselves ; that she has thoughts, which she can interchange with us, of her very own ; that she is not as yet absorbed, as young ladies sooner or later become, in the individuality of some one of the opposite sex, not at all likely (taking the average of male creatures) to be in any way superior to ourselves. In Walter's case, the consciousness that there was a secret between Lilian and himself gave intensity to this pleasure, yet no one will surely venture to assert that he had fallen in love with his young hostess. The recollection of the circumstances that had admitted him to her presence, must alone have been sufficient to preserve him from such folly ; he was poorer even than his friend the captain ; his future was even still less promising ; and, after the experience of his host's conduct towards her whom Lilian had herself described as his favourite daughter, what hope could there be of Mr. Brown's looking with favour—nay, with patience—at the pretensions of such a suitor as Mr. Walter Litton ! At all events, Mr. Christopher Brown, who was said to be worth a plum, the fruit, too, of his own planting, and who had a great character for good judgment in the City, was evidently of the opinion that no such maggot could have entered into his young guest's brain, as will be seen from a certain proposition he made to him after dinner.

That period "across the walnuts and the wine" had been looked forward to by Walter with some dismay : he would have liked to have gone at once into the drawing-room, and listened to Lilian's playing on the piano, a little nearer than at the distance it now came to him through the wall ; or, if that might not have been, even to have left Willowbank at once, and finished the evening with his friend Jack over the fragrant pipe. He felt that wealth was not the only thing that he had not in common with this friendly Croesus, and that an "unpleasant quarter of an hour," and, perhaps, a good deal more—

for his host had ordered spirits-and-water for himself—was lying before him. If he would only talk of Lotty, then, indeed, he would try his very best to do her some service ; but that he should choose such a topic to converse on with an utter stranger seemed to the last degree improbable. It was to his great relief, therefore, that so soon as the young lady had withdrawn, his host observed : “ You smoke, of course ? ” for tobacco, amongst its other priceless benefits, confers the advantage of silence without embarrassment. “ There are some cigars, young gentleman, such as you have seldom tasted,” added the old man, as the box was handed round ; “ they cost me three guineas a pound, though I imported them myself.”

“ They are excellent, no doubt, sir ; but I hope you will not feel aggrieved if I take a pipe instead : I am accustomed to pipes, and do not wish to acquire extravagant habits.”

Walter said this in joke, since as a matter of fact, he greatly preferred a pipe to a cigar, but his companion took him *au pied de la lettre*.

“ That shews you are a very sensible young fellow,” said he approvingly. “ I did not take to smoking myself till I was long past your age, because I couldn't afford it ; and I would have smoked pipes if they had agreed with me. As it was, I smoked cheroots. Can you guess why ? ”

“ Well, no, sir ; these things are so much a matter of fancy.”

“ I never do anything from fancy, Mr. Litton, and I never did. I smoked cheroots, partly because they were cheaper, partly because I hated the extravagance of biting off the end of a cigar and throwing it away. The wasting of that end was a positive wickedness in my eyes—a mere wanton sacrifice to the caprices of fashion.”

“ I see,” said Walter, amused at his host's devotion to principle in such a matter ; “ and I suppose you put the small end of the cheroot in your mouth instead of the big end ? ”

“ Most certainly I did,” returned his companion seriously ; “ a man who does otherwise is, in my opinion, a mere wasteful puppy.”

“ But they say it draws better.”

“ That's rubbish,” interrupted the other ; “ a transparent device of the manufacturer, to cause a greater consumption of the material he supplies. Why, you ought to know that, since

you know so much about 'drawing,' eh?" and the old gentleman stirred his toddy, and expressed that species of satisfaction peculiar to persons who do not often make jokes, but when they do, flatter themselves that they are successful.

Walter laughed, as in duty bound, and said it was very polite in Mr. Brown to give him credit for knowledge in his calling.

"Not at all, sir; I never pay compliments," said his host. "I know something about your 'art,' as you painters are so fond of calling it, though I have paid for it pretty dearly. There is more than a thousand pounds 'locked up,' as I call it, in this house—the interest of money that I have spent in pictures. It is not a bad investment in these days, to those who can stand the immediate loss. O yes, you can draw and paint too, Mr. Litton. Now, with respect to this picture 'Supply-cation'—here his voice became suddenly grave and earnest—"did it take you long?"

"Well, yes, sir; many months. But it need not have done so, had I not lingered over it: one does, you know, over work that pleases one."

"Just so; I have done it myself," answered the other thoughtfully. "Many and many a day, when all the other clerks had left, have I sat at my desk conning over every figure; but your figures are very different, eh?"

The old gentleman's tone was still jocose, yet it was evident from his manner that he was upon a topic that had a serious interest for him.

"Did you paint this picture from—from the life?"

"I did, sir; that is, a model sat to me from it."

"A model? Do you mean a young lady?" asked Mr. Brown in a voice that in its eager curiosity was almost anxious.

"Yes; a young woman sat for the picture; it was originally intended to be a portion of an historical work: I painted her as Queen Philippa beseeching her husband to spare the citizens of Calais: only, there is no King Edward, and no citizens."

"Ah, indeed." Then, after a pause: "You recognised the likeness to my daughter Lilian, I perceived?"

"Well, yes, sir."

"And yet you never saw her before, I suppose?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"Well, I should like another portrait of her, this time taken from the life, but treated in the same style, so as to make, as it were, a companion picture. Is there not some one in history—some girl—who had no necessity to plead for pardon, either for herself or others; one whose character was faithful, dutiful, unselfish, like my Lilian?"

"There is Joan of Arc, sir," reflected Walter; "a hackneyed subject, it is true; but so far, for that matter, is Philippa. I could paint your daughter in that character: faithful, dutiful, helpful for others, cheerful, in spite of adverse fate; but it would put the young lady to some inconvenience; these historical subjects take more time than ordinary portraits."

"I see. But can you not, as in the other case, get some one else to sit, in the proper costume and so forth—the same, perhaps, as sat before—and then, for the features and expression, paint from my daughter herself?"

"That is possible, sir; but I cannot promise to produce so good a likeness as in the first instance, where I had no original before me. These chance successes are difficult to repeat. There is an old story of a painter who could not paint a cloud to his liking, and, in his irritation, threw the brush at the canvas, which made by accident the very effect he wished to produce; but if he had thrown the brush a second time, it would probably not have made a second cloud. I will do my best, however."

"No man can do more, sir. We will consider that as settled, and I will give you the three hundred pounds for the Joan which you refused for the Philippa. Yes, yes; I must have my own way this time; and Lilian will sit to you when you wish."

"Under the circumstances, I shall not need to trouble her for some time; the preliminary work will take——"

"Well, well, begin it at once, that's all," interrupted his host impatiently. "You gentlemen of the brush are rather slow in your movements; it is the same with the painters and glaziers, whom one can never get out of the house. Now, I suppose I shall not be able to get this Philippa picture till the autumn, shall I?"

"Not till after the Academy is closed. No, sir; I fear not."

"Well, that's a great injustice. When a picture is bought

and paid for, one ought to do what one likes with it ; that's my notion of property."

"But consider, sir, if everybody acted upon that idea, what blank spaces there would be on the walls before the Exhibition was over !"

"Pooh, pooh ; let them paint the walls."

It was clear the old gentleman was getting irritable. Up to this point, Walter felt that he had made a favourable impression, and, much as he wished to see Lilian again, he feared this impression might be marred by his delaying longer at Willowbank that evening. The gout was evidently beginning to trouble his host, and there were indications in his manner which shewed he was growing impatient of the presence of his young guest.

"Well, if you will allow me, Mr. Brown, I will set about this affair of your daughter's picture—since you seem to be in a hurry for it—at once ; it is still early, so that I may, perhaps, this very evening, secure the services of my model for to-morrow."

"An excellent thought, Mr. Litton," returned the old gentleman with an eagerness that shewed how accurately his guest had read his wishes. "Yes, yes ; I like to see a young man prompt in business. My daughter is also my nurse, and just now I require her services ; so perhaps you will excuse her entertaining you in the drawing-room. I will make your compliments to her for you ; and drop me a line when you are ready to paint her. Good-bye, sir, good-bye." And in five minutes, Walter found himself on the other side of the lodge-gate, and in the world of London.

The events of the last few hours seemed to him like a dream, and yet the result of them had been very material. He had a cheque for a hundred pounds in his pocket, and had obtained a commission which would bring him in three hundred more. But this was the least part of what had happened to him. He was conscious of a complete revolution in his own feelings. He adored Lotty still with the same honest devotion as of old ; his interest in her was just as great, and his desire to help her had even become active instead of passive ; but there was not the same sense of hopelessness within him as he had experienced heretofore. He had not transferred his allegiance to her

sister ; he was loyal as ever to her cause ; but he felt, for the first time, that his allegiance might be due elsewhere than to Lotty. His position was somewhat analogous to that of a wavering Jacobite, who could own a king *de facto*, as well as a king *de jure*. What astonished him most was, that he felt no regret that he had sold his picture ; he endeavoured to account for this by the reflection, that it was passing into the hands, not of strangers, but of those who had a greater right to it than himself ; but what undoubtedly more compensated him for its loss, was the fact, that he was about to paint its companion-portrait from the life ; that he must needs spend days, perhaps weeks, at Willowbank, with Lotty's sister, and so, in a manner, would have the original beside him to console him for the absence of the copy.

The first step to be taken was to seek out little Red Riding-hood, and to covenant with her for certain sittings which were to be commenced forthwith ; and to this end he bent his way towards her humble dwelling. It was a mere business affair to him—just as buying stock would have been to Mr. Christopher Brown—and the only consideration that he had in his mind was, what increase should be made in Miss Nellie Neale's rate of pay for her services—which should in some measure reflect his own good-fortune, and yet not spoil the market ? But the romance of that eventful afternoon was by no means over for him yet.

CHAPTER XIV.

NELLIE'S LOVER.

THE private residence of Mr. Neale, as distinguished from his professional abode at the corner of Beech Street (which was, in fact, a cellar, though it was called a stall), was quite a palatial dwelling, if he had occupied the whole of the premises himself; but of the five rooms of which the house was composed, he let out two to lodgers, and, therefore, the parlour on his ground-floor was not dedicated solely to the reception of visitors; it was the dining-room, and also the kitchen, whereby, let us hope, that great desideratum, heat, was always insured for his mutton-chops, and the plates that they were served upon. But Mr. Neale, it is to be feared, did not often rejoice in mutton-chops; it was a dish that very, very rarely was tasted, or even smelt, by the inhabitants of Little Grime Street, in which he lived. The day on which there was bacon enough for himself and his four children, including Nellie, who was the only one grown up, was a feast-day with the family, and one which he would have marked with a white stone, if he had known how to do it. There was some sort of cookery, however, in progress when Mr. Walter Litton looked in, sufficient, at all events, to call forth the apologies of the cobbler, who was himself superintending it; while his three little girls were arranging the supper-table, quite in the Russian fashion, with a lettuce of the size of a parasol, and some remarkably fine onions.

"It is not for you to apologize, but for me, Mr. Neale, for having intruded on your supper-hour," said Walter, patting the curly head of the smallest girl. "Why, your board looks like Covent Garden, little missis."

"Well, yes, sir," answered the cobbler, stirring the vessel on the fire with a large iron spoon; "when meat is scarce, we makes it up with vegetables; they are always wholesome, and they're very filling. Won't you take a chair, Mr. Litton?"

The cobbler was a great favourite of Walter's, and the regard was reciprocal. The worthy man had long lost his wife, and had had a hard time of it in endeavouring to bring up his four girls in comfort and respectability ; he was obliged to be much away from home, nor had he been able to afford to hire any one to look after them in his absence ; but they were good girls, he said, " though he said it who shouldn't say it ; " and the elder ones had " seen to " their juniors, and when nine years old, were better housekeepers than many young ladies are found to be who marry at nineteen. He had a hearty cheerful face, not at all handsome, but with an honest pride in it ; and though his locks were grizzled, he looked as though there was happiness for him yet, such as a man generally contrives to find who works for others, and does his duty by them.

" Where's Nellie ? " inquired Walter, " that you are doing the cooking, Mr. Neale ? "

" Well, it's only tripe, sir," answered the cobbler ; " and she knows I'm equal to that. She'll be home in a minute or two ; indeed, I thought it was her when you came in. "

" It's rather late for her to be out, is it not ? " said Walter.

" Well, no, sir ; not this beautiful summer weather : the cool air does her good, and I ain't afraid of her getting harm in other ways, thank God ! Nelly's a good girl, if ever there was one. But she ain't well, sir. Perhaps you haven't noticed it, but the last few days she has seemed to me more white and spiritless-like, and she's been ailing off and on ever since the spring. "

" I have not seen any change in her of late at all," said Walter gravely.

" I daresay not, sir ; but then, you see, you're not her father. Not but that you have behaved as kind and honest to her as though you were, Mr. Litton. I have reason to be thankful to you on many accounts, Heaven knows ! You're having her to sit for you so constant, is a great help to us, though I wish it would be in the mornings, as it used to be, and not so late in the day. By the time you have done with her, and she has made her little purchases for the house, it's getting on for bedtime, and I scarcely see anything of her now. "

" I wish her to come in the mornings," said Walter quietly ; " that will suit me better, as it happens, for the future. Will

you ask her to come in to-morrow at the old time, instead of the afternoon? She will understand, if you just say that."

"I will tell her, sir, and with great pleasure."

"Yes; but don't tell her that I called, Mr. Neale; say I sent round a message, will you? I have a reason for it."

"A reason for it?" said the cobbler. "Deary me! She has not offended you, I hope!"

"Not at all. The fact is, I have some news for her; and I wish to tell it her myself. I have just sold the picture for which she sat for a good sum, and I think I can afford her a little better pay."

"Indeed, sir, you are very good. Why, it is only the other day—not a month ago—since you increased it. She has been even able to save some money to give herself a few days at the seaside next month, which we are in hopes will do her good."

"Indeed," said Walter dryly. "Well, just give her my card, with these few words on it, and don't say a word—nor let her sisters say one—of my having called here."

The old cobbler promised readily; and the little girls, delighted at the surprise that was awaiting their sister on the morrow, and the nature of which they thoroughly appreciated, promised also. Indeed, as Walter quitted that humble roof, he left the whole family radiant. But the smile faded off his own lips so soon as he had shut the door behind him. Had poor little Red Riding-hood gone to the bad? was his first thought; and the conviction that it was so gave him the sincerest sorrow. He was frank and simple in character, but it was not through ignorance of the ways of the world, and especially of the London world. Directly the old cobbler had said: "Perhaps you haven't noticed it, but the last few days, Nellie has looked white and spiritless," he had at once grasped the fact, that she was deceiving her father, and making a pretended engagement in his studio an excuse for her absence from home. He had not himself set eyes on the girl for seven weeks. Most persons in his place would at once have blurted out the truth, but he had not had the heart—that is the hardness of heart—to do so. Any time would be time enough to tell the poor old man of his daughter's shame, if she had stooped to shame; and it might be possible to spare him even yet. If Nellie knew that he had called in person, she would conclude

that he had discovered her deceit, and would perhaps have refused to come to Beech Street. His common-sense told him that in such a case there was extreme danger of precipitating a catastrophe: many a girl on the road to ruin has been hurried on to that fatal goal by the reproaches of those who have taken it for granted that it has been already reached. That it had been reached by poor Nellie, Walter had only too much cause to fear. That she had taken money from some one, pretending that it was her earnings in Beech Street, was a bad sign indeed; while that talk of a few days at the sea seemed to point only too surely to her intention of leaving home at no distant date with her betrayer. But until he was certain of this, he resolved to shield Red Riding-hood not only from evil to come, if that might be possible, but also from reproach for what had passed; and to conceal what he had learnt even from his friend Pelter, though Jack himself had shewn a kind interest in Nellie. It was not so much far-sighted prudence—the reflection that a girl's good name once spoken against is not to be lightly cleared, even from groundless scandal—as sheer tenderness of heart, that actuated Walter in this matter, and which was at once his strength and his weakness. If it had caused him to “philander” with a married woman, it also kept his lips sealed as with the seal of confession with respect to the frailties of a single one. He had plenty to tell Jack (though he by no means told him all) with reference to his visit to Willowbank, without touching on any other subject, and they sat up together half the night discoursing upon it. Jack thought Mr. Christopher Brown ought to have come down more handsomely in the case of Philippa (for Walter had not told him how he had been tempted by “advances,” and refused them, and given way in the end to sentiment): “A hundred pounds is far too little to have taken from so big a fish as Mr. Brown; but, on the other hand, he will be punished for his parsimony by giving three hundred for your next picture, which won't be half so good. No, sir. Mark my words: Joan will be comparatively a failure. The inspiration will now be wanting, unless, indeed, you happen to take a fancy to this young lady in duplicate.” Walter smiled what he flattered himself was a smile of sadness. “Well, my lad, that is as it may be. I have known a heart dead and buried, as it were, in

barren ground, dug up, and going again very wholesomely, before now. At all events, your material prospects have now become very flourishing indeed, and I congratulate you upon them most heartily. There will be lots of work to do at that house. You will have to paint the old gentleman himself——"

"In lamp-black," suggested Walter.

"No, no ; I mean Mr. Brown. You must take him very solid and irrefragable ; his cheque-book lying before him upon that plain desk, which you may depend upon it, was the one he used when he had but fifty pounds a year and the reversion of his employer's boots. It has the same interest for him, I don't doubt, as Sir Isaac Newton's first arithmetic book, or Nelson's earliest toy-ship, would have for the public. He is one of the great professors of the art of getting money, and understands it thoroughly ; but he knows nothing about how to spend it, and you must teach it him. Point out the desirability of his having frescoes upon the staircase walls, and when you have convinced him, give him my card. 'Orders executed for frescoes with punctuality and despatch,' shall be printed upon it, expressly to 'fetch' him. I shall rise with you, Watty—I feel it—up that staircase. Let us embrace. Let us drink the health of 'Christie Brown'—it sounds quite poetical. There is Christie Johnson, gone, poor thing ; and Christie somebody else, I don't know who, but she haunts me. Oh, it's the auctioneer. Well, he's always 'going,' and that's sad too. Bless you, Watty ; you are enriched, and yet you are affable !"

From the style of which discourse, it may be gathered that Mr. John Pelter had been wishing luck to his friend for a considerable time, and was rather overcome by his feelings, and what he had mixed with them.

"You'll set to work at once, Watty, of course," were his farewell words. "I won't keep you up. Early to bed, and early to rise, is the way to get—screwed, yes, *very* screwed, by Jove ! But you *will* set to work at once, for my sake !"

"Yes, yes. Nellie Neale is coming to-morrow morning to sit for Philippa. Good-night, Jack ; good-night." And Jack took himself off with difficulty, stopping more than once upon the stairs to wink at the moon, which was shining very brightly and to remark that, though so rich, she was affable.

For once, Walter did not bewail the weakness to which his

friend had given way, for, whenever he so committed himself, he was certain to be late on the ensuing morning, and he did not wish him to see Nellie.

He had little hope that Red Riding-hood would sit as his model any more, and if that should happen, it was better that she should come and go without the observation of a third person. It had seemed easy for him, when in Little Grime Street, in presence of her father and sisters, to administer reproof to Red Riding-hood, and to warn her against a course of conduct which must needs bring shame upon them all; but in his own bachelor apartments, as the hour drew near for him to play the part of Mentor, he became conscious of his personal unfitness for that role, and almost regretted that he had not left her misconduct to be dealt with by her natural guardian and protector. However, it was too late now for retreat, and he had to screw his courage up as best he might; only, he could not help wishing that he was the clergyman of the parish, or, at all events, the father of a family. Nellie was always punctual, and, at the appointed hour, he heard her ring at the door, her well-known step upon the stairs: if he had not heard them, he would hardly have recognised her when she entered. She was as pretty as ever, indeed, perhaps prettier, for loss of colour does not detract from your dark beauties; but she looked very pale, and worn and thin; the brightness that had once lit up her face on bidding him good-morning, was exchanged for a spasmodic smile, which passed away with her salutation, and even before it—"went out," as it were, leaving the fair face blank and desolate. She was no more Little Red Riding-hood, but had grown up to find that there were wolves in the world under a more attractive guise than even one's grandmother. Her dress was always neat, but he noticed that it was made of better material than heretofore.

"My father told me, Mr. Litton, that you had sent last night——"

"I called myself," interrupted Walter quietly, "and saw your father. Take a chair, Nellie."

She was very glad to do so, as he saw, for she trembled from head to foot.

"I—I—didn't understand that you had been there yourself, sir."

"Yes ; I wished to see you about sitting for another picture."

"Thank you, sir ; but I don't think I can do that at present," answered Nellie quickly.

"And why not ?" inquired Walter, looking as much like the clergyman of the parish, or, at all events, the curate, as he could, and adopting a tone such as he considered suitable to ecclesiastical cross-examination.

"Well, Mr. Litton, I have my hands full of other business. There's father and the girls——"

"Nay ; your hands are not full of *them*, Nellie."

Her attempt at duplicity gave him confidence, for he had a natural hatred of and indignation against lies. "It is no use your pretending that to me, though you may deceive them by a story of your being engaged in my studio every afternoon. Suppose I had said to your father : 'She has not been there for these seven weeks,' as perhaps I ought to have said ?"

Nellie answered not a word, but sat with her eyes, with tears creeping slowly out of them, fast fixed on the ground.

"It is not my place, Nellie, but your father's place, to be talking to you about the manner in which you spend your time. But I do so to spare him, and, if it be possible, to save yourself."

Her pale face flushed in a moment, and she sprang to her feet. "What do you mean by that, Mr. Litton ?" cried she, confronting him. "You have no right to say such words."

"As your friend and your father's friend, Nellie, I have a right ; nor do I use them without good cause, or, at least, what seems so. When a young girl in your position—I don't speak of it disdainfully, Heaven knows !" for she had uttered an ejaculation of what he took to be wounded pride : "the case would be most serious for any young lady who should act thus ; but in your case it is most dangerous—I say, when a girl absents herself for hours daily from her father's roof, and is so ashamed of her occupation during that period as to conceal it from him, nay, to trump up a false story, in order to account for her absence, there is good ground to suppose that she requires to be saved—from herself, at least. If you have a lover, why should you be ashamed to confess it at home, if he is an honest man ?"

"He is a gentleman," said Nellie proudly.

"I am sorry to hear it," was Walter's dry reply; "for in that case, under the circumstances, it is still more likely that he is not honest."

"You do not flatter him, nor me, sir," answered Nellie bitterly.

"I don't wish to flatter you; I wish to tell you the truth. If this man pretends that he loves you, but bids you keep his love a secret from your friends, he is lying! Do you suppose that it is you alone who can deceive people by specious stories? I daresay he has the best of reasons—private ones, but such as you will understand, he says—for not marrying you just at present. In the meantime, he gives you money——"

"You are very, very cruel!" interrupted Nelly, crying bitterly. "You misjudge him altogether."

"Still, he does what I have said," answered Walter fiercely.

"And if he does, he has a reason for it. His family is a very high one. But there! it is no use saying anything to you, and you have no right to say anything to me!"

And with that, she turned as if to go. There was a look of excited resolve in her face which did not escape Walter's eyes; he stepped between her and the door, and locked it. "You shall not go to that man to-day," said he; "I will send round to your father at his stall; and he shall take you home."

"O no, no, no!" pleaded the girl, falling on her knees. "Oh, do not tell my father!"

"I will, so help me Heaven! Nellie, unless you tell me who this man is. If he is not a scoundrel, there can be no harm in my satisfying myself upon that point. If he is——"

"O Mr. Litton, he is no scoundrel; he is a gentleman like yourself; only, he does not wish folks to know about it. In a few days, I shall be his; he has promised it; but in the meantime, I was to tell nobody, and you, least of all."

"Me! What! Do I know the man?"

"O yes; he is a friend of yours; I met him—that is, he saw me here for the first time. It is Captain Selwyn. But he would be so very, very angry if he knew I told you his secret: on my knees, I beg of you not to reveal——"

"Kneel to God, and not to me, Nellie!" said Walter, in hoarse but solemn tones, "and thank Him that you have told me in

time to save you from ruin. Captain Selwyn is a married man ; I saw him married, with my own eyes, not a year ago, in Cornwall."

" Married ! " echoed Nellie, and fell forward on the floor, as though she had been a lay-figure, and no model. She had fainted away.

CHAPTER XV.

COMING ROUND.

WALTER LITTON was neither a Puritan nor a Saint ; his nature was too genial to have permitted himself to be either ; he thought many things venial which morality would stigmatise as vicious. But seduction was not in his eyes, as so many men profess to regard it, an impossibility, and he held it to be infamous and cruel. In the case of a married man, he justly considered it to be especially criminal ; and if Nellie and her would-be betrayer had both been strangers to him, he would have pitied the one and abhorred the other. But as it was, he had never felt such anger against any human being as he did now against Reginald Selwyn ; partly because he had tried to ruin Little Red Ridinghood, who in simplicity was almost the child of the nursery legend after which she had been called ; and partly because he was Lotty's husband. With this last fact it was not his business, perhaps, to have concerned himself ; yet the reflection, that the captain was not even faithful to that tender flower, that he had transplanted from its home garden, and which was fading in sunless poverty for his sake, moved Walter most of all. If he could have learned where the man was to be found, he would not have hesitated to let him know his opinion of him ; but this information Nellie resolutely refused to give. " I shall see him once," said she, " to give him back his presents ; but never again. And there is no occasion for you to quarrel with him on my account." She seemed thoroughly to understand that he was a scoundrel, though her words of reprobation were few. " It was very false and cruel of him," she sobbed, when Walter had " brought her round " with a little cold water. " I thought he was telling me the truth, Mr. Litton, because I knew he was a friend of yours."

" He will never be a friend of mine again," said Walter bitterly. " He is a liar and a coward ! "

"But I have been a liar, too," said she; "and very, very wicked. O sir! what do I not owe to you for having—"

"There, there: don't say a word of that; but strive to make up to them at home for the wrong you have done them. You have had a narrow escape, Red Riding-hood, and it should be a warning to you as long as you live. The next time a man professes love for you, and you reciprocate it—"

Nellie shook her pretty head, and sobbed out: "Never! never! that is all over now. And please, don't call me Red Riding-hood any more. I don't deserve it."

"Well, well; I only say, if such a thing *should* happen, don't keep it from your father. No good ever came from hiding yet. As to this man Selwyn, you have only to tell him from me—"

"I shall tell him nothing from you, sir; I have done mischief enough between you already," answered she firmly.

"But you will not let him persuade you that he is not married?"

"O no, no, sir!" and she gave a little shudder of loathing, which Walter rightly considered to be more assuring than any protestations.

"And now, not this morning, but to-morrow, you will come and sit to me as usual; and we will be grandpapa and little Red Riding-hood together, just as we used to be."

"I will come and sit to you, sir," said Nellie humbly, and with a significant ignoring of his last sentence, which was very pitiful.

And the next morning Nellie came as usual, pale enough, but not with those fever-bright eyes and haggard looks that she had worn on the previous day.

"Tell me truly, is it all over between you and that man?" asked Walter; but he scarcely needed her earnest assurance that it was so, to convince him that she was not only out of danger, but cured. Anything short of the actual cautery-use of these scathing words: "I saw him married with my own eyes," which Litton had fortunately been able to pronounce, would probably have failed to eradicate the honeyed poison of the treacherous captain; but, as it was, she was saved. The shock of the operation had, however, been severe, and the poor girl suffered sadly on her road to convalescence. It was well for her.

that, besides her duties at home, she had once more her own employment to occupy her thoughts ; and it was also well to be in the company of the friendly artist, whose presence could not but remind her of the peril which, thanks to him, she had escaped.

Walter worked hard at his new picture, but it was a relief to him that for the present he could do so at home. If he had had at once to present himself at his patron's house while his wrath was at white-heat against the captain, it would have been difficult for him to discourse of his former ally to Lilian without her seeing that his regard for him had evaporated. For the present, he had not only no forgiveness for him, but not common patience—which means common charity. It was only after many days, and by accusing himself (not without justice) of being so furious against his friend, not because he was a married man, but because he had married Lotty, that he was able to look upon his offence with calmer eyes. There was this to be said, however (and though it made little difference in the moral aspect of the question, it had a very mitigating effect on Walter), no harm had been done after all ; and when the time arrived for him to revisit Willowbank, he felt that he could plead for the exiled pair, if his pleading might be of any service, almost as honestly as though the captain had not been one of them. He found Mr. Brown in much better case than on his first visit ; the gout had left him, and with it much of his peevishness and irritability ; while Lilian was looking more beautiful than ever.

He had chosen an upper room for his studio, into which his host bustled cheerily in and out, but kept no dragon's watch over him. Upon the first opportunity of their being alone together, Walter congratulated his sitter upon her more cheerful looks, which he attributed to the improvement in her father's health.

"You are more like Joan in her halcyon days, than when I saw you last," said he.

"You mean to say that I don't look so much as though I had been condemned for a witch, Mr. Litton," answered she, smiling. "Well, you will be glad to hear there is a good reason for that."

"I see one reason in your father's recovery."

"Yes ; and there is another, which has also, as I believe, been the cause of his convalescence. There is now a well-grounded hope that he will be reconciled with my sister and her husband."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Walter. "May I hear how that has come about ?"

"Well, partly, if not chiefly (as I shall take care to tell them both) through that picture of yours in the Academy. I don't think a day has passed without my father's having paid a visit there, on his way home from the City. He excuses himself upon the ground, that the Philippa is his property, and that, therefore, he feels an interest in it. But I know that he has a better reason than that. Since, for the present, he cannot see Lotty, he solaces himself with that 'counterfeit presentment' of her."

"But he can see her if he chooses, I suppose ?"

"Yes ; but there are certain outworks of pride to be broken down before he can permit himself to be persuaded out of what was once a very obstinate resolution. That they are gradually giving way, however, I am certain. A letter came to him lately from Mrs. Sheldon. Captain Selwyn's aunt, you know."

"Yes, yes ; I know her very well. But I am surprised at her arguments having such an effect, since she was the means—that is, since it was from her house that your sister was married."

"Very true ; but her husband has lately died, and she has written in great sorrow, wishing to be at peace, she says, with all her fellow-creatures, and lamenting the involuntary part she took in separating father and child. You look incredulous, Mr. Litton."

"Do I ? I did not mean to do so ; though certainly I should not have credited Mrs. Sheldon with such sentiments. But, again, I should have thought your father to be one of the last men in the world likely to be moved by them—that is, of course, from any source which might cause him to suspect their authenticity."

"That is true enough," answered Lilian ; "but Mrs. Sheldon's communication, it seems (for I have not seen it with my own eyes), also informed him that there was some improvement in Captain Selwyn's prospects. A distant cousin of his has died——"

"If it is the Irish cousin, then Selwyn is Sir Reginald," exclaimed Walter.

"I have heard nothing of that. He gains little advantage, however, I am told, in income ; but such as it is, it makes the marriage less unequal in point of fortune ; or, rather, dear papa is willing to persuade himself so, which is the main point. If he can only be persuaded to forgive Lotty, she and her husband could both come and live at Willowbank, you know, and we should be *so* happy together. Then you would always find your friend here, Mr. Litton, even if papa should be out, to talk over old times. You look as if there was some doubt of that."

"I must have a very incredulous countenance," observed Walter, smiling.

"You have a very decipherable one, and I think I read it aright. Pray, forgive me for cross-examining you so particularly, Mr. Litton, but this matter is to me of the most vital importance. You know Captain Selwyn's character much better than I do. Do you think it impossible, from your knowledge of him, that he would be persuaded to live here ?"

"Indeed, I do not. On the contrary, if he has received no accession of income, I do not see how he is well to live anywhere else."

"But I am so afraid that papa and he may not get on well together ; they are so different, you know, in their habits ; at least I should suppose so, from all I have heard of my brother-in-law."

"I think that would be of little consequence," answered Walter ; "there would on that account be less cause for antagonism between them. But, in such a case, Selwyn would have to sell out, of course, and become an idle man, and at his age that is seldom desirable."

If Walter Litton's face had been as decipherable as Lilian had described it, and if she had had the key of the cypher, it might have told sad tales. He did not think that plan of Selwyn's living idle at Willowbank would be at all conducive to his wife's happiness ; but he could not say so, nor even hint at it.

"Oh, but papa could give him something to do ; he has often talked, for example, of getting some one he could trust to superintend his affairs for him ; and don't you think——"

But here Mr. Brown himself happened to look in, which preserved Walter from the necessity of having to say what he

thought of making an ex-captain of Her Majesty's dragoons, who had not at present been remarkable for his business habits, into an estate and property agent. And the subject was not afterwards resumed by Lilian. She was never tired, however, of talking about Lotty, whose return to her home was evidently her one absorbing thought. Not a taint of jealousy, of fear lest she should once more become her father's favourite, and oust herself from the place which in her absence she had occupied, tinged her sisterly love. She had plenty of conversation upon all topics, for she had read and thought much more than most girls of her age, and, indeed, much more than Walter himself; but this homespun talk of hers pleased him most—not only because it concerned Lotty. Her every word seemed to give assurance of the simplicity and unselfishness that dictated it. In some superficial respects, she was inferior to her sister. She had not so much of what her sex term "style." She lacked that air of conscious superiority, born of wealth and beauty, which he had noticed in Lotty when he first met her; but she had the same gentle graciousness of look and manner, and twice the wits. It was shocking, as he admitted to himself, to be making so odious a comparison. If he had been interrogated a month ago about Lotty's intelligence, he would have pronounced it perfect; the fact being, that her external charms had been so all sufficient for him that he had not looked beyond them; but now he confessed that Lilian was greatly her superior: she had more sense, more feeling, more principle. This was really very hard upon Lotty; but then everything was allowable, or, at all events, excusable, because of this last advantage that Lilian certainly did possess—her thoughts were not entirely monopolised by a beloved object (male). He did not mind their dwelling upon Lotty—far from it—but I think Mr. Walter Litton would have privately resented it, had they dwelt upon another Reginald Selwyn. As for having fallen in love with her himself, however, I have already stated what a sensible young man he was, and how ridiculous, impossible, and futile any such notion must have appeared to him; indeed, he was continually repeating to himself a hundred arguments against his committing such a piece of folly, from which we may conclude how safe and sound he felt. If this had not been the case, he would have been placed in quite a dangerous position at Willowbank, for Mr. Christo-

pher Brown, as I have said, left him a good deal alone with Lilian in the painting-room ; and the depicting a very beautiful young lady as Joan of Arc affords rather exceptional opportunities for falling in love with her, which a less prudent young gentleman would have found it hard to put away from him. This conduct of his host was caused by his complete confidence in Lilian's character and dutifulness, and not at all from the reflection, that she would surely take warning from her sister's fate. He considered Lotty's fiasco in the light of an unparalleled misadventure, which could not happen twice in a respectable family ; and perhaps even drew some comfort from its occurrence on that very ground, just as some folks flatter themselves that travelling by rail is all the safer because an accident has taken place on the same line the previous day. At all events, Mr. Brown was not only civil to the young painter, but even, so far as his nature permitted him to be, cordial and friendly. He was confidential to him also after dinner ; as Walter thought, extremely confidential, but then he did not know that upon one particular topic (and one only) Mr. Christopher Brown was prone to be confidential to everybody ; this was upon his own personal history and rise in the world, which he was wont to relate in a didactic manner, for the edification of any one he could get to listen to him. How he had begun his financial career by earning pennies for skidding the wheels of omnibuses on Holborn Hill, which was in reality a flight of imagination, though he had told it so often that he had actually begun to think that such was the case. He had been employed, when quite a lad, by the omnibus company, on account of his trustworthiness as a time-keeper, and had occasionally put his shoulder, or, at all events, his hand, to a wheel. But it was Mr. Brown's weakness to disparage beginnings, as it is that of others to magnify theirs, in order, by contrast, to make the present, which he had finally achieved, the more magnificent. "I used to earn pennies, sir—that is, when I was fortunate enough to get a penny for my trouble, instead of a halfpenny—by skidding wheels in Holborn Hill. But while they *descended*, I *ascended* ; while I put the drag on in their case, I accelerated my own motion towards independence. The pennies became shillings, and, begad ! I looked at a shilling more than the proverbial number of times in those days, let me tell you, before I parted with

it; and then the shillings became pounds. I never got a hundred pounds in a lump, young man, and far less three hundred " (this was in delicate allusion to the price agreed upon for Joan of Arc), "when I was your age; but what I did get, I saved, and put out to the best advantage. I had only two friends in all the world, sir, at that time, Diligence and Economy; but they stuck to me, and by their help I won the fight."

Mr. Brown might have added, that his too devoted allegiance to them "at that time," had prevented his making friends of a human sort till it was too late to make them. If it had not been for his marriage, which, to his honour, was one of affection, he would have had nobody upon whose unselfish attachment he could have counted for the smallest service, from those early days on Holborn Hill up to the present date. His wife had died; and one of his daughters, as we have seen, had undutifully deserted him, so that he had but faithful Lilian left. She was a great treasure, it is true, yet only too likely to pass into other hands. It was no wonder that he reckoned that wealth at a high value, which was his only consolation for the absence of friendly faces, loving hands, and for the sake of which he had foregone them. Walter pitied, and strove not to despise him, while he quoted his shallow laws about getting and saving, as though they were Holy Writ, and boasted of his growing fortunes. The old man thought him entranced with wonder, and indeed he was so—with wonder how, from such a crabbed stock, two such dainty blossoms as Lilian and her sister could have sprung. And yet Christopher Brown had his good points about him, to which his young guest was by no means blind. He was really a man of strict integrity, notwithstanding that he plumed himself so on its possession; nor was he mean, though he was cautious in spending the wealth which he had so drudgingly acquired. "I can do as 'smart' a thing" (by which he meant as liberal a one) "as any man, when I think fit," he would sometimes say: and therein (though he did not often think fit) he spoke no more than the truth. On the first day, Mr. Brown confined his private conversation with his guest almost entirely to the topic of his own success in the world; nor did he say one syllable which would have led him to imagine, had he not been aware of the fact, that he had another daughter beside Lilian. And yet there

was one circumstance which, in Walter's eyes—which were sharp enough in drawing a deduction—had a significant reference to Lotty's marriage. After dinner, they had adjourned, for smoking, to an apartment which was evidently the business sanctum of the master of the house : a room in which there was no furniture of the ornamental kind, and not a single book, except one bulky one which happened to be lying on the table. This was the *Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom*. Walter was far too much of a man of the world to be surprised at seeing such a volume in such a place ; he knew that your "self-made man" is by no means disinclined to worship at the shrine of those who, unlike himself, are indebted for their making to their ancestors : and he took it up carelessly enough. He was a little struck, however, by its opening at a particular page, the leaf of which was turned down, so as to point with its edge to the name of Selwyn. "Selwyn, Sir Richard," he read, fifth baronet ; Donaghadee, Ireland, and Long's Hotel, Bond Street. Unmarried. *Heir Presumptive, Reginald Selwyn, Captain 14th Dragoons.*"

And these last words were underlined in pencil.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEBT IS PAID.

TWENTY-four hours only had elapsed when Walter paid his second professional visit to Willowbank ; yet in that short interval, as he could perceive by the manner of his host and hostess, some important incident had taken place. Mr. Brown was fussy and nervous ; Lilian was nervous too, though her bright eyes and cheerful tone betokened an unusual elevation of spirits. Nothing was said explanatory of this until the three were in the painting-room, and Walter had settled to his his work.

Then, " Your picture is coming home to-day, Mr. Litton," observed the old merchant sententiously.

" My picture ! What ! from the Academy, sir ? Nay ; that is impossible."

" Well, if not your picture, the living likeness of it. You did not know, perhaps, that I had another daughter—Lilian's twin-sister ?"

" Yes, sir, I knew it."

" Well, perhaps you know, then, that she has been separated from us by an unfortunate disagreement ; in fact, I objected to her marriage, though she married well, as the world calls it—that is, in point of position. Her husband is Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom."

The air with which the self-made man delivered himself of this remarkable piece of information was something stupendous. If it had not been for Lilian's presence, and for one other reason, Walter would have burst out laughing. The other reason was, the somewhat serious difficulty of his own position ; as to how much he should own to being cognisant of ; how much he ought to pretend that he was hearing for the first time. Upon the whole, he thought it best to hold his tongue, and bow.

" Yes, sir, my daughter is Lady Selwyn —"

The old gentleman hesitated, as though he were in doubt

whether to add, "also of the United Kingdom," or not. "She has been a stranger to her home for many months ; but she is coming hither with her husband to dine to-day. I hope you will join us ?

"Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Brown. But perhaps on such an occasion —"

"A stranger might be in the way, you think," interrupted the old gentleman. "On the contrary, we should prefer it. It will tend to make matters go more smoothly. You have yourself, too, had a hand in the matter—unwittingly, it is true—but still we feel, both Lilian and myself, indebted to you for Philippa. It cannot, indeed, be considered a portrait, for Lotty is all smiles and brightness ; but there is a something in it which has reminded me of her very much. At all events, we associate you, if you will permit us to do so, with this auspicious meeting."

Never before had Mr. Christopher Brown delivered himself of such sentiments, or given evidence of possessing such a graceful eloquence. That the speech had been prepared, neither of his hearers could for a moment doubt, but whence could he have culled this flowery style ? Could it have been *caught*, thought Walter, from his connection—indirect as it was—with the *Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom*, already ?

"Under these circumstances," continued the old gentleman, "we hope you will not refuse to meet Sir Reginald and Lady Selwyn at our table to-day."

"I shall be most pleased," said Walter ; then feeling that something more than pleasure was expected of him from such an invitation, he added, "and honoured."

"I am sure papa is very glad that you are going to dine with us," said Lilian, when the old gentleman left the room. "He feels not a little embarrassment, after what has passed, in meeting Captain Selwyn, and he has never seen him, you know."

"And I have seen him so often. Don't you think that will be a little embarrassing for *me* ?" inquired Litton, comically.

"No ; because he thoroughly understands your position. I have written to dear Lotty to explain it all from beginning to end. It was for her husband's sake, and her's, not your own, that you were silent about your previous acquaintance with him."

"That is true. But I feel not a little compunction in concealing so much from your father. He is so kind and hospitable to me ; and I feel as though I had gained his good-will by false pretences."

"I quite understand your feelings, Mr. Litton ; but I really do not see how matters could have been managed otherwise. I am sure, if he had known that you had been acquainted with my sister, and especially your share in her elopement (for such he considers it), he would not have been so moved by your picture ; indeed, he might very possibly have believed it to be a concerted plan between you and her husband ; and you know it is not as if she had really sat to you. The likeness, if not absolutely accidental, was not designed ; you had never even seen her as you have represented her."

"That may be all very true, but I am far from satisfied with my own conduct. Don't you think, Miss Lilian, that now, when all has turned out so well, it would be better to make a clean breast of it, and tell your father ?"

"Oh, *pray*, don't, Mr. Litton," she pleaded. "You don't know how large a share you have had—even papa admitted it just now—in this happy reconciliation. Without you—that is, without your help, unintentional, but yet to which I am sure Lotty has been so welcome—all this would never have been brought about. Mrs. Sheldon's letter of itself would have done nothing, had not papa been already, as it were, prepared for it ; and remember, it has all been done for my dear father's good, for his happiness. He is not like the same man since his heart has been softened towards Lotty. Oh, please, don't let us run any risk."

"It shall be as you wish," sighed Walter, "and still, as they say in the melodramas, 'I will dissemble.' After all, it is only my own character for straightforwardness, not yours, I am glad to think, that is in danger ; only, when the truth does come out, and your father turns me out of his house as an impostor, I hope you will say a good word for me, Miss Lilian."

"Indeed, indeed, I will, Mr. Litton. But as for turning you out of the house, that is nonsense. In fact, what necessity is there for the truth, as you call it—that is, for the facts of a case which you have never been asked to speak about—coming out at all ? It is very much more to Captain Selwyn's interest

than to yours, that you should be considered a stranger to him. Oh, Mr. Litton," she continued, suddenly bursting into tears, "I am afraid you are thinking hardly of me. I do not love deceit; I hate it: I hate myself for counselling you to hide the truth; it is only that of the two evils—the deceiving my father for his own good; and the telling him all, with the dreadful risk of his forgiveness to Lotty being cancelled—I honestly believe that I am choosing the less."

"I quite understand you, dear Miss Lilian," answered Walter, earnestly, and his voice was low and soft as her own as he spoke the words: "I quite understand; nor have I for a moment imputed to you any other motive save that which has actuated you, and which—whether it be wise or not—seems to me to do you nothing but honour. My only desire is to serve you and yours, and all that you wish shall be done in your own way."

Here he held out his hand, and she put hers in his, and pressed it thankfully. It was only, as it were, in ratification of their little compact; but at the touch of that small palm, Walter's pulses began to throb in a fashion which—if we did not know how very sensible a young man he was, and with what admirable arguments he had steeled himself against the indulgence of futile hopes—was almost like the spring-time of Love itself.

She did well to be grateful to him, for he was doing for her and one other what he would have done for no one else. Concealment of any kind, and far more deception, was abhorrent to Walter. He had reproached himself all along for the part he had been playing at Willowbank in relation to his host, notwithstanding all these arguments which Lilian had urged in its favour, and which he had already applied to the case in his own mind; but he had resolved, when the reconciliation between Lotty and her father should have been accomplished, that he would tell all to him, and relieve himself, at any cost, from this irksome burden. And now he had been persuaded to carry it still longer, in spite of a certain penalty that would be very grievous to him, more grievous, indeed, than he dared to own, but which he now foresaw would sooner or later be the consequence of his so doing. In one respect, he thought he judged the old merchant's character more accurately than his own daughter; and he did verily believe that the day on which

Christopher Brown discovered himself to have been deceived would be the last he (Litton) would ever pass at Willowbank. Such a sentence of exile would be very bitter to him (more bitter, as I have said, than he would have liked to confess even to himself), and yet he had promised to risk its infliction ; and there was one thing certain—he would keep his word. Walter Litton was, upon the whole, an impulsive man ; his impulses were good, which was fortunate, since he acted on them rather than on fixed convictions. Of the possession of the thing called "principle," in connection with any well-defined system of religion or philosophy, he could not boast : he did what was right—such as an act of generosity, for instance—because it seemed to him right at the moment. He never went home and looked at the matter this way and that, and, upon the whole, decided that it was "contrary to principle," and therefore didn't do it. I have no doubt that would have been the right way for him to go to work ; but yet it is certain that most such proceedings in our mental parliament do end in the "Noes" having it ; and I have always noticed that stingy persons are possessed of very high principles indeed. But though he was so deficient in this respect, there was one thing to which Walter held with the tenacity of a martyr to his faith—and that was, his word. He might be wrong in doing so—he sometimes was, just as the martyr is wrong—but he stuck to it all the same. He was wrong, as I venture to think, in this particular case ; but he had given his word to Lilian, and therefore she did well to be grateful, for it was irrefragable. Have you noticed, reader, what kind of person it is—you may not have done so, for the genus is very rare—whose word is thus to be depended upon ? It is generally a woman, or, if not a woman, a man of feminine type ; one whose physique, whose voice, whose manner, do not impress one very forcibly, or give one much assurance of power—delicate-handed, soft-voiced creatures, in whom such resolution is quite an unexpected trait, and which we resent the more in them from that very circumstance. "Obstinate as a mule," we call such a man, who opposes himself to our wishes, just because he has promised to do this or that ; or, if it be not a man, "A self-willed little slut."

Walter did not stay on at Willowbank till dinner-time on

this occasion. His host dropped no word, as before, of there being no necessity for evening dress ; the coming of Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom (which he was not, by-the-by, but his father-in-law had picked the phrase up, and found it pleasant, like a sweet morsel rolled under the tongue), and of Her Ladyship, his wife, was a circumstance that seemed to Mr. Christopher Brown imperative of evening dress ; so Walter went home to attire himself. He found a letter awaiting his arrival, inclosing a cheque for fifty pounds, and a few lines from the captain :

“ MY DEAR LITTON—I inclose the pair of ponies, for which accept my best thanks. You are, of course, aware that the old gentleman has come round, that it is a case of ‘ Bless you, my children,’ and ‘ Welcome home.’ This all comes, as I told you it would, of my having become a Baronet. Only an Irish one, it is true ; but then, you know, with some people, even ‘ Lord Ballyraggum is better than no lord at all.’ My wife desires her kind regards.—Yours faithfully, REGINALD SELWYN.

“ P.S.—Think of your having struck up an acquaintance upon your own account with my new papa ! How small the world is, after all ! ”

Walter read this missive more than once, and with much more attention than its contents would have seemed to deserve. It was not a gracious letter, nor, though its style was so familiar, did it smack much of ancient friendship. If the captain knew that his friend was intimate at Willowbank, he must surely also know how that intimacy had come about ; and therefore must be aware that the reconciliation was by no means solely due to his fire-new title. Walter was not a man to look for “ a return ” for any good service, even in the shape of an expression of gratitude, but this total ignoring of what he had done in the matter was not quite pleasant. The phrase, “ struck up an acquaintance,” and especially the words which followed it, “ on your own account,” seemed indeed almost offensive. He studied the epistle thus carefully, in order to learn from it, if possible, whether little Red Riding-hood had told Selwyn from whose lips she had received the information that had dis-

appointed his designs. Upon the whole, Walter thought that she *had* told him, or if not, that he had guessed the truth. There was a "stand-at-guard" air about the letter, which was not in his friend's usual style, though it was not absolutely hostile. He was less indifferent to this than he would have been at the time he bade Nellie use his name; not only because time had mitigated his wrath against the captain, but because he did not wish to have an enemy at Willowbank. He deemed it probable, as I have said, that, sooner or later, he should be banished thence, but he wished to put off that banishment as long as possible. What seemed very strange even to himself, was, that this was the first consideration that occurred to him; and not the reflection, that within an hour or so, he was about to meet Lotty for the first time since her marriage, and in her father's house.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIR REGINALD PROGRESSES.

HERE is many a dinner-party that is not a party of pleasure, although our inviter may have designed it to be so, in all good faith. It is not pleasant, for example, to be asked to meet a creditor, who is rarely at the same time one's friend ; nor a man to whom, from any cause, it is necessary to make one's self civil, if one is not inclined to be so ; nor some very great personage indeed, the satisfaction of meeting whom consists solely, if there be any, in the being able to boast of it afterwards ; nor one's old love as a newly married woman ; nor one's old friend, with whom there is a feeling of estrangement. Perhaps these last two are the most unpleasant to meet of all, and they were both awaiting Walter Litton that evening. He was to meet them also in the presence of a host who was unconscious of his acquaintance with them, and from whom he had designedly concealed that circumstance. He would have to act a part, and one that he felt he was ill adapted to fill, throughout that evening, and perhaps for many evenings to come. It seemed to him that this was infringing the laws of hospitality, and soiling by ignoble use that name of gentleman of which he had hitherto thought himself worthy.

Without having any exaggerated opinion of himself, he had, up to this time, found himself perfectly at ease in any society to which he had been admitted, and had imagined, and with reason, that so it could have been in all cases ; he was not dazzled by rank and show, though it was intuition rather than experience which had convinced him of their emptiness ; his very simplicity made him natural in his manners ; and natural manners—when the nature is good—are the best in the world. But on this occasion, while he attired himself for that little party at Willowbank, he felt like a girl who is going to her first ball—flurried, and nervous, and excited, and rehearsing to himself those little speeches, which are so certain not to be re-

membered when the time comes for their due delivery. His difficulty, like hers, was, that he could not foresee what others would say to him; he did not know what attitude the captain might adopt towards him, nor how far either he or Lotty would assist him in feigning a mutual ignorance of one another. So embarrassing was his dilemma, that he actually found himself considering whether it would be better for him to arrive late or early at Willowbank; in the end, he determined on going early, since he could then have no surprise sprung on him by the gallant captain—of whom he had suddenly grown unaccountably suspicious—in the way of judgment being passed against him by default. It would be clearly a disadvantage to him to enter the drawing-room without knowing what had passed at the first meeting of Sir Reginald with his “papa.” This plan turned out even better than he had anticipated, for his cab drew up at the front door at the same moment as the very respectable brougham which conveyed the baronet and his bride, and the three met in the hall. Their mutual greeting was sufficiently guarded not to excite suspicion in the servants, yet warm enough to establish an understanding between themselves; and they entered the drawing-room together, like guests who have already made one another’s acquaintance, and who need no further introduction. That was the ordeal, indeed, which Walter had shrunk from most of all—the moment when his host should say: “Mr. Litton—my daughter,” or “Mr. Litton—Sir Reginald,” because it would necessitate an overt act of hypocrisy, as it were, on his part, whereas up till then he had only deceived by silence. This unpleasantness was now altogether avoided, partly by the circumstance I have mentioned, and partly because the position was too grave and peculiar to admit of mere conventional observances. The old merchant was standing stiffly by the fireplace when the three guests were announced; but the sight of his daughter was too much for the dignity he strove to maintain, and he stepped quickly forward and embraced her tenderly; then he offered his hand to her husband with a frank “I am glad to see you, Sir Reginald,” and almost immediately afterwards to Walter himself. The ceremony of reconciliation was, in fact, made as short as possible; but for all that, it was plain that it was not without its effect upon the host, who, disinclined, or perhaps

unable, to speak more, gazed with tears in his eyes at his two daughters as they rushed into each other's arms. It was only natural, therefore, and in accordance with good taste, that Selwyn and Litton should affect to ignore his emotion, and enter into conversation together.

"If he asks you whether you have ever met 'Sir Reginald' before, Litton, you can say no, with truth," whispered the captain hastily; "and the same holds good with regard to her ladyship yonder." This specious method of evading the difficulty had certainly not occurred to Walter, and did not recommend itself to him now, but, nevertheless, he replied: "All right, old fellow; I'll do my best." And then they fell to talking aloud upon indifferent topics. While they did so, Walter could scarcely keep his eyes off Lotty. Cloaked and hooded as she had been on her arrival, he had had no time to observe her fully; but now, in the brilliantly lit drawing-room, he noticed with pain how cruelly care had dealt with her brightness and beauty; so cruelly, indeed, that knowing what he did, he could not but suspect that not only care, but neglect and unkindness, must have had their share in effecting such a change. Her face had lost its rounded lines, its delicate tints, and had become sharp and wan; her eyes were red, which could scarcely have been accounted for by the tears that she was weeping then; her trembling lips smiled, indeed, but as though smiles were strangers to them; nay, the burden of sorrow seemed to have weighed upon her very frame, for her carriage had lost all the grace of girlhood.

He had feared for her some fate of this sort, and, under the apprehension of it, had portrayed her, as we know, from imagination; but so far had the actual change outstripped his fears, that, forgetting for the moment that the old man, like himself, had made a picture of her in his mind more consonant with the portrait than with the original, he almost marvelled how his picture could have recalled her to her father's remembrance. It was evident that the old merchant perceived this change himself, for he regarded Lotty with an expression of wistful tenderness that he took no pains to conceal; but, in all probability, he set it down solely to her long exile from home, and loved her, we may be sure, no less, that absence from his arms and roof had wrought such woe with her. He did not

even apologise to Walter, when, upon dinner being announced, he offered his own arm to Lotty, and Selwyn of course taking Lillian, the young painter was left to bring up the rear of the little party alone. Except, however, in these tacit evidences of his affection and forgiveness, the host seemed resolved in no way to allude to the cause that had led to the dismemberment of his family ; and his guests were only too glad to maintain a similar silence upon that topic.

The conversation at first was somewhat scanty and constrained, but never so much so as to become embarrassing ; and as the good wine circulated which had been so long a stranger to the captain's palate, it moved his always fluent tongue to animated talk. His native sagacity taught him to avoid jesting under what he afterwards described as those " rather ticklish " circumstances, and even to sink that tone of careless frivolity which was habitual to him ; but he narrated incidents of his military career in a cheerful and entertaining style. Instinct told him that the army was not a profession that was popular with his new-found father-in-law, and therefore he confined himself to such anecdotes as would be most likely to interest an outsider. Had he been but a mere captain in the Heavies, he might not have succeeded so easily in gaining Mr. Brown's attention ; but that gentleman's ear, like those of many others of his class, was particularly formed to receive the narrations of persons of quality ; and though he made some considerable resistance to the voice of the charmer, in the way of interruptions and objections—as if in protest against injured fathers-in-law being placed at once on too familiar a footing—he, in the end, accorded him a sufficiently gracious hearing. The story that pleased him most, and the one which the cunning captain had kept in reserve with that very object for after dinner, was the one known in military circles as " the tale of the Golden Lions," a sort of typical narrative which shifts its date to suit the times, and which, since the captain's day, has been permanently attached to the taking of the Chinese Emperor's Summer Palace : but it does, in fact, pertain to an earlier epoch of British warfare—namely, that of the first Chinese war, in which the captain's colonel was engaged, and who (unless we are so bold as to disbelieve a baronet) told it to him with his own lips.

"It was about that opium business, as you doubtless remember, sir," said the captain, addressing himself to his host, "that the war was begun which ended in the opening of the ports."

"I remember it well, Sir Reginald," observed Mr. Brown. "I was stopped on my way to business, for the first time in my life, from mere curiosity to see the waggons that brought home the Chinese indemnity pass along the street. There were twenty-one million of silver dollars—twenty-one million," repeated the old gentleman, smacking his lips, for the mention of a large sum of money was always music to him.

"That was the precise sum," said the captain deferentially; "though I should not have ventured to state it from my own recollection."

"Ay, but I don't forget such things," said the other, much pleased to find his own memory so complimented. "It was the only war in which this country has been engaged through which we ever reaped a pecuniary advantage; that is one of the reasons why I am a peace-at-any-price man, and am not ashamed to own it, Sir Reginald."

It was probable that the captain's opinion of peace-at-any-price men was not a very high one, but you would never have supposed so, had you seen his polite and almost assenting bow.

"Well, I was about to observe, sir, that large as that indemnity was, my present colonel—Markham—then a lieutenant in a foot regiment, had it once within his power (had he but known it) to have returned home with even a larger sum to his own cheek—I mean, at his private account at his bankers," added the captain hurriedly. His speech was apt to be garnished by slang terms; and though, as he had proved, he could put a restraint upon himself in all important matters, these little verbal eccentricities would occasionally escape him. "It was just before the preliminaries of peace were signed, and while the troops were before Canton —"

"It was Nankin, if it was anywhere," observed Mr. Brown severely, for that notion of "one's own cheek," as being synonymous with one's banker's account, had savoured to him of something like profanity.

"I daresay you are right, sir; but, at all events, Markham

himself, with a company or so of his regiment, found themselves separated from the main body of the army; they were on a foraging expedition, or more likely a marauding one, for Markham's captain had always an eye for 'loot,' and had ventured much farther into the interior of the country than he had any authority for doing. They knew that the war was at its close, you see, and that if anything valuable was to be got, it was to be picked up at once."

"Upon my life, Sir Reginald," said the old merchant, "your tale, so far as it is gone, is not very complimentary to your cloth."

"Well, you see, there are soldiers and soldiers: with some, all is fair in love and war—that is, in war."

The slip was terrible. Most men in the speaker's position would have thought it irreparable, and given up their anecdote altogether; but the captain was made of cooler stuff.

"Of course its wrong," he continued; "but there will be soldiers of fortune as long as the world lasts," like Major Dalgetty."

"Is he in your regiment also?" inquired Mr. Brown, with severity.

"O no, sir; I merely instanced him as the sort of man I am talking about. They are often good soldiers, and serve the state as well as themselves, we must remember. Look at Clive, for example, and—and, oh, a lot of fellows."

It was now Mr. Brown's turn to bow, which he did in very qualified adhesion to these sentiments.

"Well, Bob Markham and the rest marched a good way up the country—the people fleeing before them—till they reached a certain imperial residence of which they were in search. It was very splendidly furnished, and of course they sacked it. The walls of one room were lined with silver plates of half an inch thick—with the proceeds of some of which, by-the-by, Bob afterwards purchased his company. There had been hopes of jewels, I believe; but these had been removed, in anticipation of their visit; but altogether it was a great haul, and very glad they were to get back to camp with it—those, that is, that managed to do so, for they were cut off by the imperial troops, and had to fight their way through them. But the curious thing was that the Chinese themselves could never be per-

suaded that our men had reached the palace. They shewed their silver plates ; but those carried no conviction. ' Such splendours,' they said, ' were to be found in the house of many a rich mandarin. Had you really been to Bong-gata-boo (or whatever its name was), you would certainly have brought back its golden lions.'

" 'What golden lions ?' asked Markham, rather irritably, for he did not relish not being believed about such a matter, for the expedition had been a very smart thing.

" 'Why, the lions that guard the gates ; you must have passed between them, if you ever got inside.' Then he remembered that upon each pillar was a lion, in brass, as they had all supposed, about eight feet high, which some of the soldiers had pricked with their bayonets.

" 'Well, what about them ?' he asked. ' I saw the lions, of course.'

" 'Only, that they are of solid gold, and the richest prizes in all China,' was the reply.

" Perhaps he could never have got back alive with them ; he always protests that he could not ; but he and his men had beasts of burden with them, and other means of carriage ; and he has often told me in confidence that it could have been done, had it ever entered into his mind that the images were of the precious metal. Then he tears his hair (what little is left of it), and proclaims himself the unluckiest dog alive, since he is only a colonel of Heavies ; when he might, but for the merest chance, have been a millionaire, Mr. Brown, like yourself."

This last shot was a bold one, for it inspired no little risk to the shooter, but, fortunately for the captain, it went home. The story, with its flavour of gold about it, had greatly recommended itself to the old merchant ; and this concluding hint at his own wealth, so far from making him suspicious of the captain's motives, was received with uncommon favour.

" Well, well ; I don't know about being a millionaire, Sir Reginald," answered he complacently ; " but I have reaped the usual reward of much frugality and toil. If you won't take any more wine, young gentlemen, we will join the ladies."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WAR IS DECLARED.

DINNER-TIME, and after dinner-time, at Willowbank, on this momentous occasion, had thus, we may say, been very successfully got over for all concerned. Thanks to the old merchant's forbearance, or respect for the baronetcy, and to the captain's intrepid behaviour, all disagreeable topics, as well as those embarrassing silences which are almost as bad, had been avoided. It was true that the talk had been confined to these two gentlemen; but Lotty and Lilian (who had also contrived to maintain with one another a conversation in an undertone full of interest for themselves) were thankful to have been excused from taking part in it; and Walter was by no means displeased to find himself second-fiddle—or, rather, playing no instrument at all—in the newly united family band. If he could only have escaped observation, and above all, interrogation, for the rest of the evening, he would have thought himself fortunate indeed; it would have been enough for him to watch the others in silence; to speculate, though with pain and sorrow, upon the causes that had produced the alteration in poor Lotty's looks; how it had come to pass that her pretty ways had vanished, and whether they had been stamped out for ever by poverty and neglect, or if, under the sun of her new-found prosperity, they might grow and bloom again. Upon the whole, he was not hopeful of her; she seemed to him like some bright and shapely vessel which had struck against a hard and jagged rock, and had only not gone down, and that its happy crew—"Youth at the helm, and Pleasure at the prow"—were dead and drowned. Nor did he hesitate to identify that rock with her husband. He was certainly indebted to Selwyn for having caused matters so far to go off so swimmingly that evening, without hitch or kink; but he was not grateful to him for it; he resented (though he felt that the captain was but acting a part) that he should seem so

animated and careless, while his wife looked so wan and woful even in her new-found home. That she should sit with her sister's hand fast clasped in hers, so silent, and, as it seemed to him, always on the brink of tears, filled him with pity, but also with anger against the man who had brought her to such a pass ; and even that she could not give himself one smile of welcome or recognition—though that was made impossible by the necessity of the case—irritated him against the captain. Lilian indeed smiled upon him brightly, nay, gratefully, whenever he looked her way ; but she too was pale and thoughtful, and had scarcely addressed a word to him throughout the evening. It was of course but natural that she should be occupied with her sister, and that her face should somewhat mirror that of Lotty ; but he felt it hard that the reconciliation in which he himself had had so large a share should bear such bitter fruit for him. Perhaps, too, though he would not have confessed so much, he was somewhat jealous of the strides that the captain was making in the favour of his father-in-law ; not that he wished him not to gain his good opinion, and all the benefits that might flow from it, but that, somehow, he felt that whatever influence Sir Reginald might acquire with Mr. Brown, would be used to his own disadvantage. He had more than one secret of Selwyn's in his keeping—especially that one connected with Nellie Neale—the revelation of which might have done him serious harm ; and though he would have perished rather than reveal any one of them, Selwyn might not give him credit for such chivalry, and in that case would have cause to fear, and therefore to intrigue against him. A man that would ill-treat his own wife—for he *had* ill-treated her—and especially such a winsome and delicate creature as Lotty, could not be expected to entertain honourable ideas, or, indeed, to stick at anything. Walter had thought hard things of his former friend more than once, and had repented of them ; but now he entertained such thoughts without repentance.

He was standing by the drawing room table with his coffee-cup in his hand, pretending to look at some engravings, but in reality occupied in these bitter reflections, when he heard Mr. Brown address his son-in-law as follows : " Have you been to the exhibition this year, Sir Reginald ? "

Then Walter knew that it was coming ; that the subject

which had been so happily avoided up to that moment was about to be touched upon ; and that he would be called upon to play some deceitful part in the discussion. How he wished that he had pleaded indisposition, or work to do at home—an excuse which his conscientious host would readily have admitted—and taken himself off immediately after dinner ! But it was too late now.

“ Well, the fact is, Mr Brown,” returned the captain, in a low voice, “ that, until the day before yesterday, when your generosity placed us upon quite another footing, dear Lotty and myself had not much money to spare for exhibitions, nor, indeed, for anything else.”

It was plain that the old merchant was pleased by this confession, or perhaps by the deferential and almost humble tone in which it was couched, for his manner altered at once from studied carelessness to a certain confidential assurance, as he rejoined : “ Well, well, all that is over now ; let bygones be bygones. Of course, I cannot forget what has happened. I should be very culpable not to make a difference—and a great difference—between the daughter who has disobeyed me, who has been undutiful, and her with whom I have had no cause to be displeased. But still I shall take care that Lady Selwyn shall possess an income for the future sufficient, with economy, to maintain her rank.”

“ You are most kind, sir ; much kinder than the—that is, than I have deserved of you,” returned the other. His words were those of gratitude, and, to his father-in-law, they doubtless seemed to express it ; but, to Walter’s more sensitive ears, who also knew the captain well, the tone in which they were spoken had both dislike and disappointment in it. He knew it must have been galling to such a man as Selwyn to have to humble himself to one like Mr. Brown, and it also struck him that that mention of a difference—“ and a great difference”—to be made between the daughters, had annoyed him excessively. He would have avoided playing the eaves-dropper, had it been possible, but their conversation had taken him utterly by surprise, and was now already concluded. The next words were addressed by Mr. Brown to Walter himself.

“ Our friend, Sir Reginald, has been telling me, Mr Litton, that he has not been to the exhibition this year, so that he does

not know what a treat is in store for him in your Philippa. 'Supplication,' by-the-by, you call it, I believe; but that is no matter, for Sir Reginald will have a name of his own for it."

"Indeed!" said the captain, with the most innocent air that his bold eyes and fierce moustaches would permit. "How should that be?"

"Well, you must go and judge for yourself; but it seems to me, and to Lilian also, the most wonderful likeness—considering that it was quite undesigned—of Lotty herself."

"Dear me! how curious!" said the captain, raising his eyebrows. "What does Mr. Litton call it?—'Supplication?' I will make a note of that;" and he took out a dainty case of ivory tablets, and entered the memorandum accordingly.

Walter felt hot and uncomfortable; he did not envy Selwyn his *sang-froid*, and yet he would have given anything to possess it. He was wroth with him, too, that he had not taken some course more likely to cut the conversation short; as it was, it was evident that the offensive topic was only just begun.

"Yes; it is in the third room of the Academy, in the left-hand corner as you enter," continued the old man eagerly. "You should go to-morrow, and see it. What is so surprising is, that Mr Litton never set eyes on Lotty before to-night."

A dreadful silence seemed to fill the room as Mr Brown said this. The two girls sat with their cheeks burning, and their eyes fixed upon the floor. Perhaps they felt like Walter—as though the floor had suddenly opened, and that one false step would precipitate him, and Lotty with him, to utter destruction. Shame covered his face, and palsied his tongue.

"Well, I can answer for it, at all events, that my wife didn't sit for the portrait," observed the captain, with a light laugh. "We have been rather hard up; but Lady Selwyn never went out as a model, to my knowledge."

"I should hope not," observed the matter-of-fact merchant austere. "I don't wish to say anything against any calling by which poor folks get an honest living, but I am afraid the models of painters are not generally models of propriety."

"Hollo! do you hear that, Mr Litton?" said the captain gaily. "Come, draw and defend yourself. Was not your Philippa, Edward's queen, then, all that it seems you have

represented her on canvas ?—tender-hearted, pitiful, regal, modest and all the rest of it ?”

Walter had felt grateful to his quondam friend for the moment, for picking him out from that hole in the floor, but this impudent allusion to Nellie Neale was altogether too much for his patience.

“The model that sat for Philippa is as honest and good a girl as any I know,” said he, in a stern voice ; “though it is quite true that persons in her position are thrown much in the way of temptation, and—of scoundrels.”

Such an angry blush leapt to the captain’s cheek, as told not only of guilt, but also of consciousness that the other knew him to be guilty ; yet his answer was careless enough, as he replied : “That is a pretty confession as respects you gentlemen-artists, Mr Litton ; for my part, I thought it had become generally understood that there were no gay Lotharios now, except in the army.”

The presence of mind and quickness that the captain exhibited had been certainly far beyond what Walter (though he had always known him to be a clever fellow in his way) had believed him to possess ; and he now began to credit him with other qualities, the existence of which he had never suspected in him, and which, perhaps, he had no reason to suspect. It seemed to him that there was a design in all Selwyn said ; that even in that general remark, for example, respecting the gallantry of the military profession, he was either making light of his own behaviour to Nellie Neale, or what was more likely, was paving the way for excuses with the old merchant, in case the matter should ever be brought up against him. If this was so, Mr Brown, of course, was quite unconscious of it.

“Well, well,” said he, “let Mr. Litton’s original be who she may, he has made a most charming picture of her, of which I am glad to say I am the possessor. Indeed, it is so good, and also, as I have said, so like dear Lotty, that I have commissioned him to paint me a companion portrait of her sister. It is only just begun—that is, so far as Lilian is concerned—but I already recognise the likeness.

This was said as though he was conferring the highest praise upon Litton’s picture which such a work of art could receive : whereas as all of us who are duly subject to authority in such

matters are aware, likeness in such a case is a very secondary affair, if only "tone" and "pose," and "meaning," and a number of other æsthetic excellencies, have been attained. A father, however, and especially a patron, may be excused for these little errors ; and Walter bowed his acknowledgments, as gracefully as though Mr. Brown had said : " Your ideal has been realized."

" Then Miss Lilian is Mr. Litton's model for the present, is she ? " inquired the captain, smiling.

" Well, of course, she does not go to his studio, Sir Reginald ; our friend here is so good as to come here, and work."

" Oh, indeed ! " returned Selwyn, raising his eyebrows : " that must be a very pleasant arrangement for him."

There was such a marked significance in his tone, that even the old merchant understood the innuendo it was intended to convey, and answered with some stiffness : " I hope so ; we do all that we can to make it pleasant, though I am aware that we are putting Mr. Litton to considerable inconvenience."

But notwithstanding the friendship these words implied towards the young painter, the eyes of the speaker wandered towards Lilian with an expression of anxiety, if not of alarm ; and from that moment Walter felt convinced that Selwyn had declared war against him, nay, more, that he had come that evening with the express determination to declare it. There were immense odds in the captain's favour ; not only from his position in the family, which might now be said to be established, but because, as he had himself observed, " all was fair in war," in his view of the matter ; whereas, as he well knew, Litton was scrupulous even to chivalry. It was a contest between arms of precision and bows and arrows, which could have but one result.

Walter did not, however, deign to take notice of the other's hostility, even by a look (and, indeed, the captain had studiously kept his face averted from him during the last five minutes), but turned to Lotty with some commonplace observation, to which she confusedly replied. No person, however unobservant, could have failed to see that something had gone wrong, and yet it seemed to Walter that her embarrassment, as she answered him, was due to other causes than that knowledge. She had shot a nervous, frightened glance towards her husband, and her words had been very cold. Could it be

possible that he had schooled her to refuse him her countenance, bidden her not only to ignore, but to forget that he had been and still was her friend? Or was she so conscious of her own wretchedness as to feel she had no cause to thank him for the hand he had had in giving her a husband—who was also a tyrant?

"I have some work to do at home, Miss Lilian, which your father's hospitality has caused me to neglect," said Walter abruptly, and with a touch of bitterness that he could not wholly stifle. "I must go now;" and he held out his hand to her.

"But you will come to-morrow at the usual time?" said she, in her clear sweet tones, made more distinct, as he fancied, even than usual, so that all in the room could hear her. "My sister is very desirous to see you paint—are you not, Lotty?—and she is coming on purpose.

"I don't know," said Lotty hesitating; "I should like it;" and again her eyes wandered towards her lord and master.

"O yes, you must come early," put in Mr. Brown authoritatively, "and spend the day; and Sir Reginald can join us when he likes. Well, if you must go, Mr. Litton, you must; this is Liberty Hall, you know." And Walter took his leave, exchanging only a nod with Selwyn.

As he walked home with his cigar in his mouth, his anger was still hot against the captain; but he could reflect upon what had happened with more patience than when he had been standing "under fire," as it were, in the drawing-room; and as usual with him, however angry, when time for thought was given him, he began to beat about in his own mind for excuses for the offender. If Selwyn really believed him to be capable of telling what he knew about Nellie, it was perhaps natural, though certainly not right, that he should look upon him as his enemy. But *could* Reginald, after so many years of friendship, believe his friend so base? Might there not be some other reason that made him hostile to him. Might he not, for example, resent his having drawn that likeness of Lotty, notwithstanding that the result had been so favourable to his fortunes. Selwyn must surely know him too well to suspect him of entertaining any improper ideas with respect to his friend's wife; and, moreover, the captain was by no means a jealous man; he

was too self-confident (and with reason) to be subject to any such passion. But the Somebody—and there *was* a possible Somebody in the person of Mrs. Sheldon—might have put the notion into his head. By itself, he would doubtless have laughed at it ; but coupled with the picture, was it not just within the range of possibility that it had made Selwyn jealous ?

Nothing could be more unreasonable or more unjust than for him to be so ; but if he was, his conduct became to a certain degree excusable. But, on the other hand, was such an explanation of his behaviour consistent with that significant remark of his, that the “arrangement” of painting Lilian’s picture at Willowbank must be “very pleasant for Mr. Litton ?” It was so pleasant, that Walter confessed to himself that if it should be broken off, the greatest happiness of his life would thereby be taken away from him ; and he had a sorrowful prescience that it would be taken away, and that at no distant date.

CHAPTER XIX.

A CONFIDENTIAL SITTING.

NOTWITHSTANDING the dismal foreboding that haunted Walter Litton as respected his connection with Willowbank, it is not to be supposed that he was even yet in love with Lilian, in any serious or practical way. If he had been charged with such an imprudence, he would probably have answered: "And am I also in love with the moon?" but there would have been more bitterness than drollery in the reply. We remember a young gentleman of our own acquaintance who was rallied upon his attachment to a lady considerably his senior, and who gave considerable comfort to his friends by replying gaily: "A man may not marry his grandmother;" and yet he did wed the lady, after all. But the "table of affinity" was nothing in the way of an impediment, compared with the obstacles that stood between Walter and Lilian. He had not even told his love, though that is of small consequence, since love is one of those things which "goes"—and also comes—"without saying." He had never dreamt of telling it. He would have thought it dishonourable—considering how he had obtained admittance to Willowbank, and his hospitable reception there—to speak to Lilian upon such a subject, without first addressing himself to her father; and if he did that, it was certain that he would be dismissed at once. Dismissal, indeed, as we have said, would probably take place, at all events; but he had no intention of anticipating it. Whatever peril to himself, whatever regrets, whatever despair, might attend such a cause, he resolved to be with Lilian as much as he could. His wings might be singed, he might be utterly shrivelled up by that attractive flame, but the light and the warmth were temptations that he could not withstand, and he would enjoy them as long as possible. And at the appointed hour next morning, he presented himself at Willowbank, and was shewn up to the extemporised studio above-stairs.

Both the sisters were awaiting him there, and received him with marked cordiality. In the morning light, Lotty looked even more wan and changed than she had done on the previous evening; but her manner was warm and genial, as though she was striving to make up to him for the enforced coldness of her late reception.

"It gave me pain, Mr. Litton, yesterday, to have to ignore so true and kind a friend as you have shewn yourself," said she frankly. "And you must please to believe that I am not the ingrate that I seemed."

"You seemed nothing of the kind, dear Lady Selwyn," answered Walter; "but only to be the victim of untoward circumstances, as, indeed, we all were. I hope the time will soon arrive when there will be no necessity for such concealment."

"Well, I think it will be better to let bygones be bygones altogether," replied she quickly. "I know what you will say—for Reginald has thought a great deal about it—that it is unpleasant to feel that there is always a risk; that when we are most secure, and all is going on smoothly, an explosion may occur out of this very secret; but that is no reason why we should light the match ourselves. Moreover, the longer it is delayed, the better condition we shall be in to meet the consequences. At present, things have hardly joined, as it were; whereas, in a little time, I hope the reunion will have been fully established—and solid masonry will stand almost any shock."

"Your husband is doubtless the best judge of his own affairs," said Walter quietly. "It seemed to me that he and your father got on capitally last night."

"Yes, did they not? And dear papa is so very kind to me. He hardly likes me to be out of his sight; and I should have been with him now, but that I could not bear to meet you a second time as a stranger, Mr. Litton. O Lilian, he was so kind on that journey to Penaddon! What we should have done without him, I can't imagine! And he has been even kinder since——"

She stopped, and blushed; and Walter coloured too at this allusion to his loan. He was not, however, so annoyed at it, as he otherwise would have been, since the fact of Selwyn's having told his wife of the matter, seemed to render it impossible that he should have entertained any jealousy of him with

respect to her. He might have been jealous, and still borrowed the money—that would have been like “spoiling the Philistines” in the captain’s eyes—but he would certainly not have let her know with whom he had incurred the obligation.

“I know he has been kind,” assented Lilian, “and is so still, since, for your sakes, he is doing violence to his own conscience,”

Walter could not help comparing the difference in the view of these two girls as respected that matter of secrecy; the one had spoken of it as a dangerous risk, and solely with regard to the material loss that might result from it; the other had referred to its moral aspect. It was true that Lilian had recommended the dissimulation, but she had made no attempt to justify it; whereas it had not even struck her sister that there was any objection—on the score of conscience—to the plan at all. But in this he was hard on Lotty, since it ought to have been evident to him that she was but the mouthpiece of her husband.

“O yes, that’s very dreadful, of course,” said she; “but it would be a hundred times worse, if papa found out you were an old friend of ours, Mr. Litton, and had been planning and plotting in our favour.”

“Nay, he could scarcely say that, Lady Selwyn, for, with all the will in the world to serve you, I had no such opportunities. The picture, you know, was a lucky chance.”

“Yes; how funny, was it not? I must certainly go and see that picture some day; as soon as I have got something fit to wear to go in. And that reminds me I have not written out what dear papa calls a ‘rough draft’ of the things I am in want of. These are to be quite independent of his arrangement with Reginald—a little present all to myself. Is he not kind, Mr. Litton?”

And off she tripped, with more of the lightness of those Penaddon days than he had hitherto seen in her. He was not pleased at the careless way in which he had spoken of his picture (how little did she guess what it had cost him; how little did she dream that it had been inspired by the memory of herself, and had been wrought out mid vain repinings!); but to see her so like herself, made him forget that, and follow her retreating figure with tender eyes.

“I suppose,” said he smiling, “your father thinks he can

scarcely do enough to show how pleased he is to get your sister back, Miss Lilian."

"That is but natural," answered Lilian gravely. "But there is another reason, I think, for his being so demonstrative: she looks so piteous—so sad. You see that, Mr. Litton, yourself, I'm sure."

"She is certainly not looking nearly so well as before her marriage," answered Walter.

"No; and, what is worse, not nearly so happy, Mr. Litton."

"And yet she ought to be happy, Miss Lilian, being thus reconciled to her father, and reunited to yourself. Perhaps it is the excess of joy, which, succeeding so much sorrow, has been too much for her."

Lilian shook her head, though Walter was at that moment painting from it, and she was generally a most careful sitter. "No, no; you are quite wrong there; though, as you say, there has been much sorrow. Sir Reginald is your friend, Mr. Litton—though (if I am not mistaken) not quite so friend-like as he used to be; and, therefore, I cannot tell you what I think."

"Pray, tell me, Miss Lilian. It cannot hurt Sir Reginald to tell me, and it will not hurt *me*. My solicitude is not for him, but for your sister. That is not because he was, as you hint, unfriendly to me last night; it always was so. I could not have painted that picture had it been otherwise."

"I guessed that much," said Lilian softly.

"Yes; of course she could be nothing to me, for I never met her till the day she"—he looked about for some euphonious term in vain—"ran away with Captain Selwyn; but her face haunted me from the moment I first saw it."

"It is sadly changed," said Lilian, in low grave tones. "Do you think six months of wedded happiness could have altered it so? No; nor even six months of poverty, or toil, or care. Nothing but misery could have effected that, Mr. Litton. My poor dear darling sister Lotty is a miserable woman."

"Let us hope not that," said Litton soothingly. "She has been living a hard life of late, remember, compared with that to which she was accustomed under your father's roof; she has had anxieties of the gravest sort, as well as petty cares, which of themselves would affect so delicate a being."

"Yes ; and she has had no one to comfort her. That man, Sir Reginald, is no comfort to her. She is afraid of him. Did you not see how her eyes followed him about—not with affection, or, at least, certainly not with affection only, but in fear ? He is a hard man, I am sure, Mr. Litton, and I believe he is a bad man."

"As I told you once before, Miss Lilian, no man is good, if weighed in so fine a balance as a young lady's judgment—unless he chance to be her husband. Selwyn is doubtless selfish, like the rest of our sex ; and he is a proud man : no doubt, therefore, he resented your father's conduct towards him, implying as it did that this marriage was in some respects a *mésalliance* ; and resentment does make a fellow a little hard."

"But he should not have resented my father's conduct upon Lotty," urged Lilian ; "no man but a coward ——"

"Selwyn is not a coward," interrupted Walter. He could not afford to neglect that chance of defending the captain on grounds where he had good standing ; the next moment he felt that it would have been better to have let it pass.

"I don't mean that your friend is afraid of swords and bullets, Mr. Litton," answered Lilian quickly. "We are all aware of that ; but there are other kinds of cowardice—and worse—than that which shrinks from death and danger. I know that his arm was hurt in battle ; but if he had lost it, his empty sleeve would not—to me at least—have atoned for his want of heart. He has no heart, to be called such ; nor courage either, or he would not have permitted you—his friend—to play the hypocrite for him. It's true that I did myself urge you to do so ; but had I been he, I would have told my father all last night, and excused you to him for what you had done for him and his ; instead of which, he made a cat's-paw of you, Mr. Litton, and shewed himself neither grateful to you nor friendly."

Walter felt that this was true : her statement of it, indeed, was the strongest possible confirmation of his own view of the matter ; but it was a subject that he by no means wished to discuss.

"I am sorry that your sister's husband should have made such an unfavourable impression upon you, Miss Lilian ; I am sure that he little suspects it."

"It is no matter to him whether he suspects it or not ; so long as he has gained my father's ear, that is all he cares for. My opinion of him is of no consequence in any way, nor his of me ; it is upon my sister's account alone that I am so grieved—so wretched. Of course, I have not told her a word of this ; nor my father either. I had no right to tell it to you—that is, to trouble you with such a matter—but I felt as though I could not keep it myself."

"If it has been any comfort to you to tell it to me, then I am glad that it has been told," said Walter gravely. "I both think and hope, however, that your affection for your sister leads you to exaggerate her woes. In a little time, now that Fortune smiles upon her, you will see her become herself again, and her husband will be reinstated in your good opinion. Adversity is not a good school for all of us, believe me ; and in happier days you will see Sir Reginald's character in brighter colours."

"Let us hope so," said Lilian. "I shall have every opportunity for doing it, since my father intends to ask him to live with us. To have dear Lotty here again will be an inexpressible pleasure to me—a few days ago, I should have deemed it the greatest that could befall me ; but, on the other hand, to see her the slave of a tyrant, spiritless, joyless, with all her illusions cruelly destroyed—that will go nigh to break my heart."

Walter saw that his companion was in no mood to be reasoned with. It was probable that she had some distinct foundation for her apprehensions or convictions, which she did not wish to disclose ; but if even they arose from intuition, it was difficult for him to combat opinions which in truth he shared. It was terribly early for her to have thus made up her mind as to the character of the man just admitted into her family circle ; but upon the whole it seemed better to let matters right themselves—if that might be—than to argue the matter further. He worked on, therefore, in silence, only now and then addressing his companion upon professional topics. "The heroine's head should be a little more to the right, please"—"Would you be so good as to smile, Joan, since you are not yet condemned to be burnt alive ? those gloomy looks are an anachronism ;" &c. &c. Then Mr. Brown came in, with Lotty leaning on his arm, and was very gracious, though, to Walter's

sensitive ear, his tone lacked its usual frankness. His looks had changed for the better, almost as much as those of his new-found daughter had changed for the worse. As he stood complacently regarding the picture, his hand beat softly upon hers, as though to convince himself that his happiness was not a dream, that he had really recovered the treasure which he had deemed lost for ever. Was it the mere recollection of that loss, or the hint that Sir Reginald had dropped the previous night, which made him, while praising the painter's handiwork, more distant to the painter himself? "You are getting on capitally, Mr. Litton. I conclude that, after a few more sittings, my daughter's presence will not be necessary to you?" Lilian looked up, as if about to speak, but did not do so. Walter felt that she had intended to say that the sittings gave her no inconvenience; in his secret heart, he flattered himself that she enjoyed them.

"I shall not trouble her more than I can help," said he.

"Just so," returned his host; "and, of course, it will be more convenient for yourself to finish the work at home. I must take these young ladies one of these days to see your studio."

"It is but a poor place," said Walter; "and you must please to give me notice, that I may have it swept and garnished."

"Yes, yes; we understand all that," answered Mr. Brown loftily. "It is not to be expected that lodgings in Beech Street should be in such a spick-and-span condition as we keep our rooms at Willowbank. We shall not take you by surprise, sir."

Presently, the dull roar of the gong sounding for luncheon came up to them from the hall.

"I am afraid, Mr. Litton," said the host, "I must take away your patient—I mean your sitter—since I have promised myself the pleasure of driving out with my two daughters after lunch."

"By all means," answered Walter, with a little blush. It was the tone of the speech, rather than the words, that annoyed him; it seemed to say so very plainly: "I can't have you hanging about the house all day, and dropping in at every meal."

"But will not Mr. Litton lunch with us, papa?" said Lotty. It was an effort that evidently cost her much; she was by

nature timid ; all the vigour and courage of her life seemed to have been expended in that runaway match of hers ; and, moreover, it was more than probable that she had received positive orders from her husband that Walter was not to be encouraged at Willowbank.

"We have some Devonshire cream in the house, Mr. Litton, I know," observed Lilian, "if such things tempt you."

"Nay," answered he, smiling ; "I rarely take lunch at all."

He was resolute not to take offence at Mr. Brown, and his meekness had its reward ; for that gentleman, conscious, perhaps, of having committed a breach of hospitality—a virtue on which he plumed himself—began now to press him to stay ; and when Litton declined, he said : "Well, well ; you must come and dine with us, again, then, some day : let us say in a week or so hence—when you have done your Joan of Arc."

The invitation was not a pressing one, and about as vague as those to which no date is attached ; and it was a proof how "hard he was hit"—how highly, at all events, he valued an evening spent in Lilian's company—that Walter accepted it with a good grace. At the same time it was quite evident to him, that neither on that occasion nor on any other would he be received at Willowbank on the old easy footing.

CHAPTER XX.

SIR REGINALD IS FRANKNESS ITSELF.

WALTER'S Joan of Arc did not make progress at the rate which its beginning seemed to promise ; nor was this through any fault of the artist. He would doubtless have liked to linger over it as long as he dared ; he was not given to "scamp" his work at any time, and this particular picture was, if we may say so without any imputation upon that prudence and good sense on which he piqued himself, a labour of love to him. He wished to do his very best with it, in order—at least that was the reason which he could have given for his solicitude in the matter—to make it a fitting companion to the Philippa. But had he been ever so desirous to make good speed, the opportunity was not afforded to him. Instead of repairing to Willowbank daily, according to the original arrangement, he was given to understand that his attendance once a week would now be more convenient ; and more than once, upon the day before a visit, he would receive a communication from his patron that Miss Lilian's engagements would not permit her to sit to him until the week afterwards. It would perhaps have been more judicious in Mr. Brown, if he wished to part these young people, that Walter should have done his work at once—so much of it, that is, as required Lilian's presence—and then have taken it home to finish, as had been at first agreed upon ; for, as it was, these periods of absence only made the meetings more attractive, and imparted to them a certain flavour of friendship and intimacy, born of long acquaintance. Moreover, artist and sitter had so much the more to talk about concerning matters that had occurred in the interval ; and since these were naturally of a domestic sort—chiefly respecting Lotty and her husband—their conferences became very confidential.

Sir Reginald and Lady Selwyn were now living at Willowbank ; but the former—for he could not suppose otherwise—

kept out of his way designedly; he had not set eyes on him since the date of that dinner of reconciliation, now some months ago. Lotty, he often saw, and she was looking somewhat better, certainly less haggard and anxious; whereas Lilian, on the other hand, had fallen off, not perhaps in her beauty, but certainly as to health and spirits. She had been depressed when he first knew her, because of her sister's misfortune; but she had always entertained hopes of its mitigation, and could rouse herself to cheerfulness upon occasion; but now she was always depressed, and at times looked so pale and piteous as to more resemble Philippa than Joan. Nor, in answer to Walter's inquiries on the matter, did she affect to conceal the cause of this alteration.

"I told you that if I found that my sister was unhappy in her marriage, it would be a very severe blow to me, Mr. Litton; and that blow has fallen."

It really seemed that, independently of her passionate love for Lotty, their twinship had something sympathetic in it, which rendered their woes common. Walter could now say little to heal this family breach—though he loyally did his best for the captain—since her complaints of Sir Reginald arose from matters that were within her own observation, and of which he knew nothing, save from her lips. From them he learned that the baronet was growing into considerable favour with his father-in-law, and that his position in the house seemed to be quite secured. To his host, he was complaisant, even to servility, and perfectly civil and polite to Lilian herself. At first, he had appeared to lay himself out to gain her sisterly affections; but perceiving that his efforts were but coldly received, he had discontinued them. To his wife, he was smooth-spoken before her two relatives; but Lilian had noticed that his voice, in addressing her, had quite another tone, when he imagined that others were out of hearing; but, independently of that, she was persuaded that Lotty lived in fear of him. A hundred little occurrences had convinced her of this, slight in themselves, but all significant, and, taken together, overwhelmingly corroborative; the way poor Lotty watched her husband, even in company; the involuntary admissions she would make when speaking of him in his absence; the start she would give on hearing, unexpectedly, his voice, his footstep;

and, above all, the loss of all her brightness and gaiety, and happy ways.

"Look at her, Mr. Litton—only look at her, as she moves and smiles, and speaks, and then, if you will tell me that I am wrong, I will bless you from the bottom of my heart!"

But Walter could not tell her she was wrong: all that he saw of Lotty convinced him that her sister's sad description of her case was but too true; that she, who, counting by months, could almost be termed a bride, was already a broken-spirited and most unhappy woman. Curiously enough, Mr. Brown did not seem to perceive this, or, at all events, to take it much to heart; perhaps he imagined that languor and impassiveness were the proper attributes of an exalted position, and that it was only natural that Lady Selwyn should have cast off the childish gaiety that had characterised her as plain Lotty Brown. On the other hand, he was somewhat anxious about Lilian. He saw the change in *her*, though even in that case only in her health; if he noticed her altered spirits, he set that down to some physical ailment; it was inexplicable to him, that any girl who had plenty to eat and drink, fine clothes to wear, and a good house over her head, could have any cause for melancholy.

"When your picture is finished, Mr. Litton," he observed on one occasion, "and before the cold weather sets in, I propose to take my little household to Italy. It seems to all of us that my daughter Lilian requires change of scene; and our medical man has recommended a warm climate."

Walter could not but express his hopes that such a plan would benefit the young lady; but he had little expectation of its doing so, since the cause of her malady would remain, or, rather, accompany her on the tour, in the person of Sir Reginald. Moreover, the information had been given him with a certain significance of tone, which, at all events to his ear, had seemed to imply another object in the arrangement—namely, that of separating Lilian from himself; and if so, he could make a shrewd guess as to whom he had to thank for the precaution. He thought this hard, since never, by look or word, had he broken his inward resolve not to abuse his position at Willowbank, by offering love to his host's daughter; but harder still, that Sir Reginald, whom he had helped to his marriage

with Lotty, should have been the person to awaken Mr. Brown's suspicions of him in such a matter. However, there was nothing to be done, or even said. It was clearly no business of his, though how nearly it concerned him, his sinking heart and faltering tongue—for when he had first heard the news, he could barely trust himself to speak to Lilian—gave evidence. If Mr. Christopher Brown had chosen to take his family to Nova Zembla, it was not for him to make objections. And after all, such a proceeding, or something like it—that is, some management which should forbid his meeting Lilian any more, was what he had expected ever since that fatal dinner-party. It would have been as easy to separate her from him—dutiful daughter as she was—by a word of paternal authority, as by removing her a thousand miles away. He felt that every touch of brush upon his picture now hastened the time that was to part him from Lilian for ever; and yet he did not linger over his task on that account; he finished it as quickly as he could, consistent with his doing it as well as he could; and then he told Mr. Brown that the rest could be completed at his own house; that it was no longer requisite for him to have his daughter before him. Perhaps Mr. Brown had expected some procrastination upon Walter's part; perhaps the quiet manner and matter-of-fact tone of the speaker for the moment disarmed his suspicions, and gave him a twinge of conscience for having entertained them; but, at all events, his behaviour upon receiving this information was more genial and conciliatory than it had been for months.

"Very good, Mr. Litton," he replied. "Your picture has, I assure you, given us all great satisfaction. We had promised ourselves, long ago, the pleasure of seeing you at dinner when it should be completely finished. I intended it to be quite a celebration banquet—to have asked some influential friends, patrons of art, who might have been useful to you in your profession; but circumstances have rendered that impossible. Before your Joan can be fit for such an ordeal, we must be off to Italy. The Philippa"—he always called it by that name, its proper title of "Supplication" being distasteful to him—"will be home from the Academy next Tuesday. Dine with us, then, upon that day, and come as early as you like. It will probably be many months, perhaps longer, before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

It was evident to Walter that Mr. Christopher Brown wished that they should part good friends—but, above all, that they should part—and on the ensuing Tuesday ; for, since his picture was finished, there would be no excuse for the young painter's presenting himself at Willowbank after that date ; and that the "celebration dinner," as his host called it, would, in fact, be a "good-by" one. The thought of this struck a chill to his heart, and made the future blank indeed. Curiously enough, however, although despairing, he was not despondent. He was resolute to go through with his farewell entertainment—that would, he knew, be like the apples of the Dead Sea in his mouth—with a smiling countenance ; to all outward seeming, he would bear himself bravely—not for Lilian's sake, for he did not venture to flatter himself that she would feel as he did—but for his own, so that, at least, he should not incur ridicule. More than one pair of eyes would probably regard him narrowly, but they should not learn from his own looks or lips that he was sad. As he had been asked to "come as early as he liked, he would do so." He understood, or chose to understand, that by that form of speech Mr. Brown intended him to spend the afternoon at Willowbank. He did not expect that his host would be there to meet him, and much less the captain ; but in this he was mistaken.

Mr. Brown, indeed, he found, on his arrival, had not yet returned from the City ; but Sir Reginald—for whom he had not asked—the servant said, was somewhere about the grounds. "The young ladies," added she, as Walter hesitated whether to join the captain or not, "are gone out shopping."

It was evident he was not expected so soon ; indeed, it seemed quite possible that Mr. Brown had forgotten he had invited him to come early.

"Shall I tell Sir Reginald that you are here, sir ?"

"No, thank you ; I will go and find him myself," said Walter, after a pause. It had now struck him that the whole affair was planned ; that the young ladies had been sent out, and that the captain was, contrary to his custom, staying at home, expressly to speak with him alone. If that was so, and he found him as unfriendly towards him as he expected, he would tell him some plain truths. In this not very conciliatory frame of mind, he walked quickly on to the lawn ; and on the path that

fringed it, he saw Sir Reginald, with a cigar in his mouth, looking at the ducks, or the nursemaids beyond them, with much apparent interest.

"Hollo ! Litton, what brings *you* here ?" said he carelessly, as he held out his hand.

"Well, an invitation from your father-in-law, which it seems he has forgotten."

"Oh, I see ; you have your polished boots on. But we don't dine at Willowbank now at the old heathenish hours ; the place—and, I may add, its proprietor—has become more civilised. This is an hour when only the wild beasts are fed. Hark at them !"

And indeed from the Zoological Gardens across the Park there came that multitudinous roar, which is the lions' grace before meat.

"I was asked to come early and spend the afternoon, Captain Selwyn," replied Walter haughtily.

"Why captain ?" said the other laughing. "You needn't be in a huff, my good fellow ; and besides, I am not a captain."

"I beg your pardon ; I should have said Sir Reginald."

"That's rubbish, Litton. I'm not a fool, like my father-in-law, to lay such store by my handle. I mean, that I have sold out, and am, therefore, no more a captain than you are."

"I didn't know you had sold out," said Walter. "How should I ? You have not been very communicative to me of late, about that or anything else."

"Well—frankly—Litton, I thought it better that I should not be. I don't want to quarrel with you, Heaven knows ; but it seemed necessary to let you know that your conduct, in one respect at least, was not such as Lady Selwyn and myself could quite approve."

"Put your wife out of the question, if you please, as I am sure, if she had a voice in the matter, she would wish to be put ; and be so good as to tell me in what I have given offence to *you*, sir."

"Well, there is no offence exactly—certainly not so much as your last words were intended to convey. But you have, as it seems to me, adopted a line of proceeding that is not only distasteful to me, but prejudicial to my interests. Of course I may be mistaken ; I should be glad to think I was so, and that the

goo? understanding that has always existed between us has been needlessly disturbed——"

"Never mind the good understanding," interposed Walter dryly; "stick to the facts, if you have got any."

"Well, I think I have," answered Sir Reginald coolly. "To be brief, my good fellow, have you not been making love to my sister-in-law, Lilian?"

"I deny altogether your right! to put to me any such question: to be plain with you, indeed, I think it a great impertinence."

"Possibly," said the captain, taking up a small flat stone, and making a "dick, duck, drake" with it on the water: "we must agree to differ upon that point. I am simply referring to the fact that you *have* made love to her."

"I have done nothing of the kind. I swear it! I have breathed no word of love to Miss Lilian Brown."

"Very good; I am glad to hear it. But there are other ways of inspiring affection in a young woman, besides breathing it. A good deal may be done by looking at her, for example, and even by a peculiar pressure of the fingers: I remember all that, you know, though I am getting such a respectable old married man."

"I have no doubt you remember," said Walter, thinking of poor Nellie Neale. This man's cool impudence was almost more than he could bear, and would have stung most men into making reprisals; yet he already regretted the significance of the tone in which he had spoken those few harmless words, lest the other should take it for a menace, and imagine, perhaps, that he wished to make a bargain—terms. Sir Reginald, however, only smiled—though, it must be confessed, not in a very pleasant way.

"Well, you may have squeezed her hand or not; that matters nothing: the point is, that you certainly intended—and intend—to squeeze it, some day. If you have not declared your love, you *are* in love with her. Come, is it not so?"

"Well, and what if it is?" returned Walter indignantly. "I don't say that it is so; but I say, what of it? and especially—in my case—what is it to you?"

"I will answer you in every particular, my good fellow; but first let us finish with the fact itself. The case is, that you ob-

tain admittance into the house of a very rich man, on pretence—don't be offended ; let us say, on the ground, then—on the ground of painting his daughter's picture ; and during the progress of that work of art, that you allow yourself to entertain sentiments for her that are a little more than æsthetic. I don't accuse you, mind, as any other man would, who is less acquainted with your character—as her own father, for example, would without doubt accuse you, if he was as certain of what has occurred as I am—of fortune-hunting : I am content to believe that you have fallen a victim to her charms, and not her purse ; but, as a matter of fact, she is very rich, and you are very poor ; and the knowledge of that circumstance, it may be reasonably urged, should have caused you to place a greater restraint upon your inclination."

"I see," said Walter coldly ; "I should have taken example from one Captain Selwyn."

"That is beside the question, my good fellow ; or, rather, it opens up the second part of it, which, as I have said, I am also quite prepared to discuss with you. It is true that I was as penniless as yourself when I made love to Lilian's sister ; but then it was not as a guest of her father's, or under any false pretence, such as that of taking her portrait. And, moreover, since you insist upon making the matter a personal one—you must allow me to remind you that it was through me—or mine, which is the same thing, that you obtained admittance to this house at all. It is surely not necessary to go into that part of the business."

"It is not at all necessary," answered Walter contemptuously. If Sir Reginald had expressed annoyance at his having painted "Supplication" from the recollection of his bride, he would have admitted that such a feeling was natural, and humbled himself, as one in some degree to blame ; but that Selwyn should have alluded to the matter thus carelessly, as a lucky accident, while, at the same time, he took credit to himself for the very secondary advantage it had conferred on Walter, irritated the latter exceedingly.

"It is not at all necessary, Sir Reginald ; and I quite understand—taking, for argument's sake, your charge against me for granted—the difference that would exist in our respective cases as suitors. But what I do not understand is this unex-

pected zeal on your part in the interests of property. I have heard you express sentiments with respect to love-making so widely different, and especially how odious it was that money should mate with money, that I can scarcely believe my ears."

"My general sentiments," answered the other coolly, "are much the same as they were; but circumstances have altered them as respects this particular case. The fountain of all sentiments, as the motive of all actions, is, I suppose, with most of us, self-interest; and it is clearly to my interests that you should not marry my wife's sister."

"Upon my word, you are very frank, Sir Reginald."

"My good fellow, I am as open as the day," answered the other coolly. "You don't suppose that I object to you as a brother-in-law, more than to anybody else? I am not, believe me, so ungrateful. On the contrary, if you were a rich man, and if Lilian must needs marry somebody, I should say: 'Take Litton.' But it is not to my advantage that she should marry anybody, and least of all, a poor man. When I won my wife, she was destined to be her father's co-heiress; but as I have good reason to know he has altered his intentions in that respect, and left the bulk of his property to her sister, it is, therefore, only by good management that it can now be retained in the family."

"So you mean, if possible, to keep Lilian unmarried all her life, for your own advantage?"

"Most decidedly, I do," replied Sir Reginald. "Not that I have the least objection to her entering into the holy state of matrimony *per se*, nor even to her choosing yourself for her husband. You might run away with her to-morrow, if I could feel quite sure that old Christopher would not forgive you. But our self-made friend yonder"—and the speaker jerked his thumb towards the house in a highly disrespectful manner—"is not the Brutus that he imagines himself to be; and he has already a sneaking likeness for yourself, a compliment he is very welcome to pay you, but not at my expense. To conclude, my good friend, I may tell you, without flattery, that you are a dangerous fellow, and that I mean to guard against you and your attractions, as best I can."

"It seems to me, Selwyn," said Walter gravely, "that you are the most selfish man I have ever known, and also the most shameless."

"Selfish, I doubtless am," replied Sir Reginald, smiling; "it is rather a common weakness with us men; and since by shameless you mean honest, I will not defend myself against that charge either; you should take it rather as a compliment to your good sense that I have been so plain-spoken with you. I have exactly explained our mutual position; and now it remains entirely with yourself, as to whether our interests are henceforth to be antagonistic, or the reverse; in other words, whether we shall be friends or enemies."

"You have, as it seems to me, settled that matter your own way, already," answered Walter grimly.

"Not at all, my good fellow. I was obliged to take precautions against you, lest you should obtain such a footing in this house as would enable you to make your own terms, or even dictate them to me; but I have no personal hostility to you whatever. Moreover, I have so great a confidence in your honour, that I am prepared to accept your promise, where I would certainly not take the word of another man."

"And what promise is it you require of me?"

"That you will never, either to-day, or hereafter, pay the attentions of a lover to my sister-in-law, or become, under any circumstances, her husband. If you refuse to give your word to this effect, it will be my painful duty to represent to Mr. Brown the pretensions you entertain to his daughter's hand; and also to take other measures—perhaps at once—the effect of which will render your paying a visit to Willowbank, after to-day, highly improbable."

"You are not only very 'honest,' as you choose to term it, Sir Reginald," answered Walter, for the first time using a tone of menace, "but, it also strikes me, somewhat audacious."

"Very likely. I grasp my nettle tightly; that is always my plan in these emergencies. Of course, I am well aware that you may do me some harm; though, on the whole, I do not think you will. You can, no doubt, make some damaging statements; one in particular, which, if you choose to make use of it, will give great pain to Lady Selwyn."

"You need not be afraid of that, sir," answered Walter scornfully.

"I am glad to hear it. At the same time, do not imagine that all the magnanimity is on your own side. It would not

be pleasant to some husbands to know that their own familiar friend had carried away with him, in his memory—out of platonic affection, no doubt—such a portrait of his bride, that he could paint from it as from the original.”

“For shame, Selwyn!” cried Walter; “your respect for your wife, herself, should forbid you to speak so.”

“Oh, I know you meant no harm,” answered the other quickly. “If I had thought otherwise, I would have shot you, six months ago, when——” His speech was rapid, and, for the first time, passionate; but he stopped himself with a powerful effort, then added almost carelessly: “But let us keep our train of argument to the main line. I have asked you a plain question; give me a plain reply. Will you promise——”

“I will promise nothing, *nothing!*” broke in Walter hotly, “with respect to my behaviour to your sister-in-law. I admit no man’s right to ask me for such a promise, and your right least of all.”

“That will do, my good fellow; we now perfectly understand one another; only, pray, don’t look as if you wanted to cut my throat, because here are the ladies.”

And indeed, at that moment, the two sisters were bowing to them from the open carriage, as they were driven up to the front-door; they alighted at once, and came towards them down the lawn.

“Mind, Litton,” added Sir Reginald in a low but menacing voice, “whatever happens this evening, you have no one to blame for it but yourself.”

But before Walter could reply, the ladies were within earshot, and Lilian was already holding out her hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW BRIDGE.

IT was a habit of Walter's—no doubt induced by the practice of his profession—to note the countenance of his fellow-creatures narrowly, and it struck him that that of Lilian, as she greeted him upon the lawn of Willowbank, wore a look that he had not seen upon it before. Her eyes were always earnest, and her voice soft and natural, never breaking into those little screams of pretended admiration or emotion, which fashionable young ladies use ; but upon this occasion, her glance was sunnier and more encouraging than he had ever seen it, while her tone of welcome had a certain demonstrativeness about it, such as, had they been alone, would have filled him with wild hopes, but which, since there were spectators, he concluded meant defiance. “ However *you*, Sir Reginald, may choose to treat Mr. Litton,” it seemed to say, “ it is my intention to shew that I am glad to see him.” Lotty too, instead of the smile with which she was wont to greet him when she and her sister were alone together, looked grave and timid ; which he set down to the same cause—namely, the presence of her husband.

“ I feel that I ought to apologise,” said Walter, “ for such an early visitation ; but it seems to me there has been a little mistake. Mr. Brown was so good as to tell me to come early—to spend the afternoon, as I understood him.

“ Then how very rude you must have thought us, Mr. Litton ! ” exclaimed Lilian. “ Neither Lotty nor I were ever told a word of that. It is so unlike papa to be so forgetful.”

“ I am afraid it is I that am the sinner,” observed Sir Reginald penitently. “ Your father did tell me this morning, Lilian, that Litton would probably drop in soon after luncheon ; but I knew that Lotty had some serious shopping to do, in which she would require your assistance (bonnets, my dear fellow, which with my wife are paramount), and so I kept at home myself—

a very bad substitute, I allow—to do the honours in your stead. My conscience smote me, I promise you, when I saw him in his white tie and polished boots (like a fellow who has been up all night at a ball)—there is something so exquisitely ridiculous in a man in evening clothes in the daytime—and reflected that he had got himself up so early all for nothing, or at least only for me; but I really did it for the sake of you ladies.”

“I beg you will leave me out of the question, Reginald,” said Lilian coldly: “if my father himself had so behaved, it would have been an act of inhospitality; but in your case it was a rudeness, not only to Mr. Litton, but to me.”

“I really cannot admit that, Lilian.”

“Then we must agree to differ upon that point—at all events, I hope you have done your best, in your self-assumed character of master of the house, to shew Mr. Litton the lions.”

“He has heard them,” said Sir Reginald, laughing. His temper, which, as Walter was well aware, was none of the best, seemed imperturbable, and only by a red spot on each cheek, could you perceive that his sister-in-law’s reproof had stung him. “He came at three o’clock, you know, as though he had been asked to dine with *them*.”

“Reggie is incorrigible, Lilian,” said Lady Selwyn, forcing a little laugh, “and it’s no use being angry with him. After all, my dear, remember Mr. Litton and my husband are old friends, and I daresay have got on very well without us.”

“Have you seen our new bridge, Mr. Litton?” enquired Lilian, without taking any notice of this attempt at mediation.

“No,” said Walter. “What bridge?”

“Why, the one papa has thrown over the little brook by the rose-garden. But you have been shewn nothing, of course!”

“There’s ingratitude!” exclaimed Sir Reginald. “Why, I left you to exhibit it to him designedly. I knew he would have to see it——”

But Lilian was already leading the way to this new wonder, with Walter by her side, leaving Sir Reginald and his wife to follow them, or not, as they, or rather he, might feel inclined.

“It is positively disgraceful,” muttered the baronet, “to see how your sister is throwing herself at that fellow’s head.”

“Let us hope not *that*, dear,” answered Lotty mildly.

"What's the good of hoping when she's doing it, stupid!" returned he angrily. It had begun to strike him that the somewhat high-handed course he had taken to prevent the young people spending the afternoon in each other's company, had not had quite the result he had intended, but, indeed, rather the contrary one—their heads were very close together, and by their eager talk they seemed to be making up for lost time.

"Had we not better go to the bridge too?" said Lotty timidly.

"No—yes; that is, *you* had better go," was the curt reply. "As for me, I can't trust myself to see the girl making such a fool of herself; though this is the last day, thank goodness, that she will have the opportunity of doing it. Follow them at once, and mind you keep your eyes open and your ears too;" and Sir Reginald turned upon his heel, and, lighting a cigar, strolled away towards the entrance gate.

In the meantime, Lilian's tongue was not idle. "That is only a specimen, Mr. Litton," said she indignantly, and scarce waiting till they were out of earshot of their late companions, "of Sir Reginald's officiousness, and of how much he takes upon himself of what ought to be my father's province. I am sure papa has no idea that you have been treated thus."

"I beg, Miss Lilian, that you will not distress yourself on my account. That you should do so, does indeed give me pain, whereas, nothing that your brother-in-law can say, or do, can affect me in any way."

"He has been doing his best, then, to annoy you?" said Lilian quickly. "I guessed that by the look of his face."

"He does not trouble himself to be very agreeable to me, certainly," answered Walter, smiling. "And yet, I have done nothing—voluntarily at least—to offend him."

"I think he is jealous of you, Mr. Litton—I mean, as respects your position in this house, and my father's liking for you."

"But I am nobody here; scarcely even a guest, since I have been employed by Mr. Brown professionally, while Sir Reginald is his own son-in-law."

"Yes; but his egotism is such that he wishes to be all in all here. As it is, I am sorry to say that he exerts a great influence over my father; this notion of our going abroad, for instance, is certainly his own idea."

"You do not wish to go abroad, then, Miss Lilian?"

"Well—no ; not for so long, at all events, or rather, not for an indefinite time, such as is proposed. One does not wish to be separated from all one's friends, without some notion of when one will see them again—does one?"

"No, indeed. But is it really decided that you are to winter in Italy?"

"Yes ; we are to go to Sicily first—in October—in a yacht, which Sir Reginald has secured. The sea-voyage has been recommended to me, it seems ; though I am sure I don't want a sea-voyage."

"Perhaps it will do you good ; you are not looking in such good health as when I had first the pleasure of seeing you."

"Is that wonderful to you who know what ails me ? It is this spectacle constantly before me of my sister's unhappiness that wears and worries me so ; and her husband, you may depend upon it, will be no kinder at sea than on land. Indeed, when I reflect upon his growing ascendancy over my father, and on the isolation from all our friends that awaits us, it seems almost as though I myself were about to be subjected to his tyranny."

"I have too good an opinion of your sense and spirit to apprehend such a subjugation, Miss Lilian ; and, in fact, I think you have declared your independence pretty plainly this very day."

"Well, I was angry at his behaviour to you, Mr. Litton, and so spoke up, but I sometimes fear that I affect a courage in contending with him that I do not possess. If I was to be ill—I mean, really ill—for example, I often shudder to think what puppets Lotty and myself would be in his hands, now that he has once gained my father's ear."

"He seems to have gained it very quickly," said Walter, musingly.

"Yes ; it is very strange, but so it is. I am ashamed to say that I think his possessing a title has given him a sort of standpoint ; for my part, however, he not only seems no better as Sir Reginald, than he was as plain Captain Selwyn, but twenty times worse ! O indeed, indeed, it is no laughing matter"—for Walter could not forbear a smile at her womanly vehemence—"and when we are from home, and—and—friends, I shall feel so lonely and so helpless to resist his will !"

"If your apprehensions carry you so far as that, Miss Lilian," said Walter gravely, "I would positively decline to leave England. There is Torquay, or the Isle of Wight."

She shook her head. "I have tried all that; but, for the first time in my life, my father has overruled my wishes. I sometimes think that there is a plot between them; for my own benefit, of course, as respects papa; but in Reginald's case, as certainly for his own advantage."

"I wish to heaven I could help you, Miss Lilian! There is nothing I would not do."

"I know it, Mr. Litton," said she earnestly. "You are a true friend to all of us; so different from that smooth-tongued man yonder, who can also be so rough and tyrannous. But hush! here comes poor Lotty; and I had so much to say to you, which I must not speak of now."

"Well, Mr. Litton, and what do you think of the new bridge?" asked Lady Selwyn, with that artificial sprightliness which a woman must be crushed indeed not to be able to assume upon occasion. "Papa was his own architect, and is immensely proud of it; so I hope you have been going into raptures."

Walter had been standing by the new bridge for the last five minutes, and not even noticed its existence, but now he hastened to express his approval.

"It is Venetian," she went on, "in its style, as papa avers; but Reginald, who, as you know, is *so* absurd, *will* call it the Willow Pattern Plate. So the question has been left by consent for us to decide, when we shall have seen Venice with our own eyes."

"You are looking forward with great delight, I suppose, to your first visit to Italy?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I am; but what we all look forward to most is, that the change will do Lilian good. We think her looking so pale and out of sorts."

"Oh, I am well enough," said Lilian wearily.

"Nay, you can scarcely say that, darling, when papa feels so curious about you; and even Reginald ——"

"Have you told Mr. Litton who is coming to dine to-night?" interrupted Lilian suddenly.

"O no, dear; I thought it was to be a secret. Indeed,

Reginald particularly told me not to mention it, so that it might be a pleasurable surprise to Mr. Litton."

"Well, Reginald has not told *me*, nor, if he had, should I be bound to obey him. Mrs. Sheldon is coming to dinner."

"Mrs. Sheldon! Well, that does astonish me," exclaimed Walter. "I am glad to hear it, however, for it shews that your father has now forgiven everybody who had a hand in making his daughter Lady Selwyn."

"O yes, he has quite forgiven her, and, indeed, likes her very much."

"Then this is not the first time he has seen her?"

"Oh, dear no," answered Lotty gaily; while Lilian leant over the Venetian bridge, and shredded a plucked flower into the water with impatient fingers. "She came to call—let me see—the very day after you were here last; and she staid to dinner; and has been here since very often."

"I don't like Mrs. Sheldon," observed Lilian quietly.

"Well, my dear, we have seen so little of her, that is, comparatively," replied Lotty nervously. "Reginald, who has known her all his life, has a very high opinion of her, you know."

"Yes, I know that," said Lilian.

"And papa is certainly pleased with her."

"I know that, too," repeated Lilian, and this time with even more marked significance.

"O Lilian for shame!" exclaimed Lotty. "What must Mr. Litton think?"

"Mr. Litton is old friend enough, or, at all events, has shewn himself friendly enough to both of us, Lotty, to be told. If we had any friend of our own sex"—and here Lilian's voice was lost in a great sob—"with whom to take counsel, it would be different, but, as you know, we have none. We see no one, now, but Sir Reginald's friends."

"O Lilian, Lilian!" cried Lotty, looking round about her apprehensively; "for my sake, for *my* sake, say no more; I am sure you will be sorry for it. It is not fair, either to me or my husband, or to papa himself."

"Very well; then I will say nothing."

"I hope you have not already said too much," sighed Lotty.

"Nay, indeed, Lady Selwyn," observed Walter, "I have

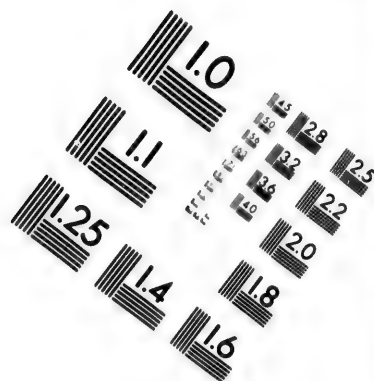
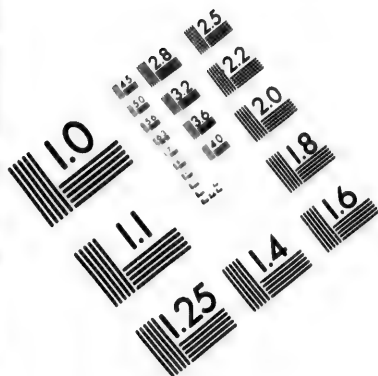
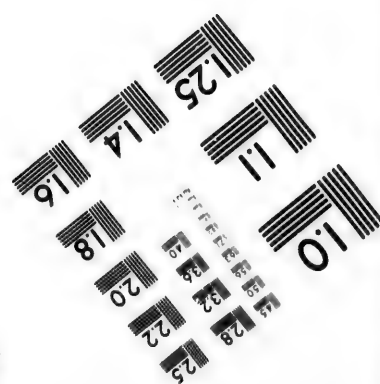
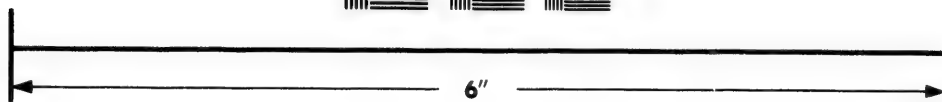
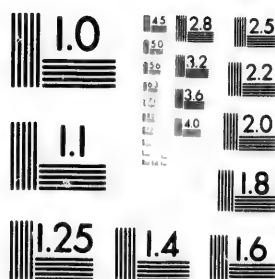


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gathered nothing of this forbidden fruit. I have no idea at present as to what it is that Miss Lilian wishes you to withhold from me ; and I shall make it a point of honour not to guess at it."

"You are very good, I am sure," said Lotty nervously, and speaking like one who repeats a lesson learned by rote. "I think I heard the front-gate click, and it is just the time for papa to be home. Had we not better go and meet him?"

"By all means," cried Walter, manifesting an extraordinary interest in Mr. Brown's return from the City, but, in reality, desirous to relieve the young ladies from the embarrassment of his presence ; and he moved away accordingly. Lady Selwyn, however, hastened to accompany him ; while her sister remained behind, perhaps to remove the traces of her tears. The former made no attempt at conversation with him, and Walter found it no easy matter to keep his thoughts from speculating upon the cause of the strange scene he had just witnessed. That something had occurred with respect to Mrs. Sheidon, which had roused Lilian's extreme indignation against her, was evident ; and also that she suspected Sir Reginald of designs of which Walter himself, who had such good reason to distrust him, could hardly believe him capable. It really seemed that the reconciliation of the little household at Willowbank had brought with it, at last, as much of evil as of good.

As they left the shrubbery for the lawn, he saw his host walking rapidly towards them, having apparently just left his son-in-law, who was standing on the carriage-sweep ; his brow was knit, and his face wore an angry flush ; but as he drew nearer, these symptoms of wrath seemed to evaporate, which Walter shrewdly set down to the circumstance that Lady Selwyn was his companion, instead of Lilian, for whom the old gentleman had probably taken her.

"Good-day, Mr. Litton, good-day," said he ; "I am afraid I must plead guilty to having forgotten that I had asked you to look in upon us early, until it was too late to alter the ladies' plans ; but I hope Sir Reginald made himself agreeable. Lotty, my dear, if you will go and dress for dinner, and then come down and do the honours to Mr. Litton, I will do my best to amuse him in the meantime. By Jove ! what a lucky fellow you are to be dressed, man. It's not often they get me to do

it ; but we have got another guest to dinner to-day besides yourself, and, unfortunately, it's a lady."

"I am sure the lady would feel herself greatly complimented, if she heard you say so, papa."

"Tush, tush ! I was only speaking generally. It is deuced hard on a man at my time of life to have to change his clothes because a woman is asked to dine. With you young fellows, it is doubtless different ; though, when I was your age, Mr. Litton, I had never had a pair of polished leather shoes on my feet, nor so much as a tail-coat on my back. The only evening-parties I ever attended were those at the Mechanics' Institute."

"Indeed," said Walter, not knowing what else to say, though he was well aware that a more rapturous appreciation of the difference between Mr. Brown's Now and Then was expected of him. "Such a mode of life must have been very unconventional and independent."

"Gad, I don't know about the independence, sir ; I had but a pound a week, except a few shillings that I made by working after-hours, and which I laid by to marry upon. People said it was rash in me to think of a wife ; but it is my opinion, that when a young fellow gets to be three-and-twenty, it is high time for him to think of such things—that is," added Mr. Brown, with sudden gravity, "if he chooses, as I did, one who is accustomed, like himself, to economising and simple fare ; for to drag a girl down from competence and opulence to what seems to her like beggary by contrast to it, is a very shameful action. Hollo ! Lilian, my dear, where did you spring from ?"

"I have only been as far as the new bridge and back, papa."

"Well, you'd better go in and dress for dinner, my dear. Your sister has been gone these five minutes."

"But my toilet does not take quite so long as her ladyship's," returned Lilian, smiling.

"Well, well ; rank has its duties, no doubt, as well as its privileges," observed Mr. Brown complacently. "Perhaps you will marry a baronet, or maybe a lord, yourself, Lilian, some day, and then, I daresay, you will take as long to dress as Lotty."

"Why should I only marry a lord, papa ?" said Lilian complainingly. "Can't you look a little higher for me ? Why should I not be a duchess, for instance ?"

"Go along with you, and dress for dinner," laughed her father, pinching her cheek ; but when she left to do his bidding, his countenance grew grave.

"Lilian is far from well," said he ; "I don't think the English climate agrees with her."

"She looked very well when I first had the pleasure of seeing her," observed Walter. "I would fain hope that her indisposition is but temporary : the heat has been exceptionally great this summer."

"No, no ; it's not that ; but something more serious, though we don't know exactly what. Dr. Agnew has prescribed change of climate. You are doubtless aware that we are going abroad next month ?"

"I have heard so, sir," said Walter quietly. "Of course, I regret it, for my own sake, but still more for the cause that takes you away."

Common politeness would almost have dictated as much as this, yet Mr. Brown was obviously displeased with the remark, and in his reply to it, ignored the sentence that referred to his daughter altogether.

"Well, yes, of course it will separate you from us completely ; but a young man like yourself is always making new friends ; for my part, I shall be most pleased to forward your interests, if it should ever lie in my power to do so. But I hope, when we come home, we shall hear of you as having made your own way in the world. After all, that is the only satisfactory method of doing it. Look at me ; I had no patrons ; I did not lay myself out to conciliate society."

"That is very true," mused Walter : his thoughts were far away, dwelling upon the time when the house before him, now so full of light and life, should, with its shuttered windows and tenantless rooms, strike desolation to his soul. Whether Mr. Brown fancied that his guest's attention was wandering, or, on the other hand, deemed his reply too opposite, he was manifestly annoyed. "Come," said he ; "though you are dressed fine enough, you will like to wash your hands before dinner, I daresay ; let's step inside." And they went in accordingly.

CHAPTER XXII.

BANISHED FROM EDEN.

NOTWITHSTANDING the reputation which Lady Selwyn had acquired for a prolonged toilet, she was the first person to come down to the drawing-room, where Walter had been "kicking his heels," as the phrase goes, while the others had been dressing for dinner. As a matter of fact, he had not been kicking his heels, but taking up book after book—profusely illustrated, and wholly unreadable, as most drawing-room books are—after the dissatisfied and changeful fashion of all too early guests; but in his case there was not only his "too earliness" to render him uncomfortable. It was impossible for him to avoid the conviction that, except to one person of that household, his presence had become unwelcome, and that it had been resolved upon by all the rest that this evening was the last that he should spend as guest beneath that roof. He was a high-spirited young fellow enough, and, under similar circumstances, would have put on his hat, and marched out of any house in London, there and then, without inflicting his company further upon unwilling companions: he was not so fond of a good dinner that he could eat the bread of humiliation with it; but though very sore at heart, he could not make up his mind thus to leave Willowbank. If there was but one within its walls who was glad to see him, she, at least, he felt sure, was very glad; if to others he was an object of suspicion, or dislike, to her he was a trusted friend. She had confided to him her troubles, and would that very day have even taken counsel with him upon some important domestic matter, had she not been overruled by her sister. He had no desire to know what it was—unless his knowledge of it might enable him to give her aid—but it was delightful to him to think that she had thought him worthy of such confidence. Possessing her good opinion, he could afford to despise the distrust of all the rest; and if he felt indignation

against one of them, it was less upon his own account, than because that one had rendered himself distasteful—nay, abhorrent—to Lillian. As for the old merchant, he only pitied him for his weakness in having been so cajoled by his son-in-law, and dazzled with his fire-new title, and as to Lotty, though he felt she had become inimical to him, he well understood that she was no free agent, but a puppet in her husband's hands. It was impossible that he could ever be angry with her, or regard her otherwise than with tenderness and compassion; and if his feelings towards her had changed, if that respectful devotion for her, which he had once entertained, no longer existed, it was not from any conduct of hers, but simply that his allegiance had been transferred elsewhere. It was impossible any longer to conceal from himself that another now reigned in her stead; if he had had any doubt of it, the fact that he no longer felt any bitterness or disappointment about Lotty's having ignored himself and his services during the time of her elopement—that she had not even mentioned his name to Lillian—should have convinced him of this. He cared no more for her indifference or forgetfulness, but only pitied her woes. As she entered the room now, beautiful and elegantly attired, and smiling—though not with the frank smile of old—he experienced none of those sentiments which her presence had once inspired: she seemed to him no longer herself at all; the very words she spoke to him—some conventional apology for his having been left so long alone—were not her words: she was but the mouth-piece and the messenger of another.

"Reggie ought to be ashamed of himself for not having been down before, Mr. Litton; he *would* finish his cigar, though I told him it was time to dress; but I have hurried over my toilet, in order to keep you company, so you must forgive him, for my sake."

"I would forgive him much more than that, Lady Selwyn, for your sake," said Walter: the words had escaped him without his reflecting upon their significance, and the next moment he was sorry that he had so spoken, for poor Lotty's face grew crimson from chin to brow. "As to your toilet having been hurried," added he quickly, "I should never have guessed it, had you not told me so. May I compliment you—as an artist—upon the colour of your dress?"

"It is Japanese," said Lotty, "and a present from papa. He is never tired of giving me little *cadeaux* of that kind. Reginald says I am like the Prodigal, whose return was solemnised by having beautiful robes given to him; only, in my case, there is no one to object to it: dearest Lilian is not one bit jealous."

"I can well believe that," said Walter enthusiastically. "She has no thought of herself. Before your reconciliation with your father was effected, her heart and head were busy with that only; she scarce seemed to live for herself; and even now it is your well-being—your happiness—which concerns her more than her own."

Lotty's pale face flushed, and in her eyes the dewy pearls began to gather, as she sighed: "I know it, ah, how well I know it! and if I could but see *her* happy—in her own way! O Mr. Litton, if I had but the power, as I have the will, to serve you both!" Here she stopped, frightened, as it seemed, by her own words. "Hush!" whispered she, with her finger on her lip; "don't answer me; I only wish you to know that I am your friend. I can do no good, but you must never think that I mean to do you harm."

"I should not think that, even if you did me harm," said Walter softly. Her words had gone to his heart; not—just then—because of their significance, though they were significant indeed; but because this tender timorous woman had ventured thus to express her sympathy.

"Do not imagine," she went on, in hurried tones, "that Lilian has told me anything; alas! I have read her secret for myself. I can give you nothing but my prayers—not even hope. She is not a girl like me, ungrateful and undutiful, who would leave her father and her home—you must give her up, or she will suffer for it."

"Lady Selwyn!"

"Oh, I know, I know: it is easy to offer such advice as mine. But, since this can never be, be generous, and spare her all you can. I hear her step upon the stairs—pray, promise me." As Walter bowed his head, Lilian entered the room.

"I hope her ladyship has been affable, Mr. Litton?" said she, smiling.

"My dear Lilian," exclaimed Lotty, "how can you be so foolish!"

"Indeed," answered Walter gaily, "I should scarcely have guessed, had I not known it, that there was any social gulf between us."

Then, as they all three laughed, Mr. Brown entered: "Come, come; tell me the joke, young people, or else I shall think you were laughing at me behind my back."

"Mr. Litton has been complimenting me, papa, upon my magnificent apparel," said Lady Selwyn promptly; "and we all think it a little grand for the occasion."

"Not at all," said the old gentleman seriously; "I always like to see people dressed according to their rank."

"But the Queen does not put her crown on every day, papa," said Lilian.

"Well, this is not an everyday coincidence: we have honoured guests to-night. And, besides," added he hastily, "my picture—yours and mine—has come home from the Academy, and such makes the date important."

"Now, I call that very pretty of papa," said Lady Selwyn. "Don't you, Mr. Litton?"

"Indeed I do," said Walter.

"Yes, yes: I shall always value that picture, young man, and, I may add, the artist who painted it."

Walter expressed his sense of the compliment, though, truth to say, the valedictory air with which it was expressed had rubbed the gilt off sadly.

"I hope the other picture will please you equally well, sir, when it is finished."

"I have no doubt of that; I will leave directions with the housekeeper about it, so that you can send it home when it is done."

This was another blow for Walter; for he had secretly intended to keep the Joan in his studio till his patron had returned from abroad; he had felt that that would be a solace to him, and besides, when they did return, it would have provided an excuse for his paying a visit to Willowbank. His chagrin was such that the entrance of Sir Reginald into the drawing-room was quite a relief to him, since it at once gave a turn to the conversation.

"Your guest is late, Mr. Brown," said the baronet.

"Yes, yes," said the merchant, who had already pulled out

his watch with some appearance of impatience. "I hope they understand below-stairs that our party is not complete."

This was a good deal for Mr. Brown to say, since it was his invariable principle—or so at least he had told Walter—to wait dinner for nobody. "Why should the rest of the alphabet have their meat done to rags, because Z is always behind-hand?" was one of his favourite sayings.

"My aunt is generally punctual as clock-work," observed Sir Reginald.

"So I should have inferred, from what I have seen of her character," answered the other. "Ah, there's the front door bell."

It was curious to see how fidgety was Mr. Brown, and still more so to observe, now that the cause of his anxiety was removed, and his expected guest had come, how he abstained from any demonstration of welcome. He remained, as if by design, in the further corner of the apartment, when Mrs. Sheldon was announced, and the rest of the company stepped forward to greet her. At the moment Walter thought this was for the purpose of observing how he himself should first meet the lady; that it was a sort of trap, laid for him, by which his host might be certified of some suspicion that he and the widow were old acquaintances. In that case, he resolved to shape his conduct by her own, which would doubtless have been decided upon beforehand. If she shrank from recognition, it would be easy for him to ignore her acquaintance; but he would no more initiate deception.

Notwithstanding her recent bereavement, Mrs. Sheldon was not in widow's weeds; she refused, it seems, to wear the customary garb of woe for a husband who, in his lifetime, had treated her so ill; or, perhaps, she knew that crape was unbecoming to her. She was dressed in gray silk, trimmed with black lace; and in the soft lamplight in the drawing-room, looked quite bewitching. She embraced Lotty with great effusion, kissed Lilian on the cheek, nodded familiarly at Reginald, whom she had met before that morning, and then held out her hand to Walter, with a "What! *you* here, Mr. Litton?" Both speech and action were so marked, so evidently designed to attract attention, that it seemed almost impossible they should have escaped Mr. Brown's notice; yet they did so. He could

not, of course, but have heard and seen, but the circumstance did not appear to strike him as remarkable ; doubtless, he concluded that Mrs. Sheldon and Walter had met during one of her recent calls at Willowbank, and therefore thought little of her claiming acquaintanceship with him. By the expression of the widow's face, it was clear to Walter that her intention, whatever it was, had missed fire in the performance. The spectators, too, had evidently expected some result ; the baronet frowned, and bit his moustache discontentedly ; Lotty, who had cast down her eyes, as though to avoid some unpleasant scene, looked up again, with an expression of relief ; Lilian, who had turned a shade paler as the new-comer addressed Walter, but had never taken her eyes off her face for a moment, wore a look of disdain. Quite unconscious of all this, Mr. Brown himself had at last come forward to greet his guest. He did so with warmth, yet, at the same time, as it seemed to Walter, with as little demonstrativeness as possible. His words were conventional enough, but his voice was unusually soft and low, and he retained the widow's hand in his much longer than is customary. Perhaps it was for this purpose that he had not greeted her earlier, since, when other people are waiting to shake hands with a lady, you can scarcely keep her fingers prisoners beyond a second or two. How often or on what occasions, Mrs. Sheldon had been a guest at Willowbank, since her mediatorial letter had been received, Walter did not know, but she had evidently made the best use of her time with Mr. Brown. It was borne in upon the young artist at once, that what Lilian had said he was old friend enough to be told, and, which Lotty had objected to being revealed to him, was, that a certain tenderness had sprung up between the old merchant and this newly-made widow. That Lilian should regard it with aversion, was natural enough ; and that Lotty, being under the dominion of Sir Reginald, this lady's favourite nephew, should not so regard it, was also explicable. He felt that those who were already his enemies in that house, had recruited a new ally, more dangerous to him, perhaps, than any one of them, in the person of the handsome widow ; for during their previous acquaintance with one another, had he not shewn himself proof against her charms ; and had not her farewell words to him been such words of bitterness as only the tongue of a slighted woman knows how to

frame? He had then been able to despise her charge that he had fallen in love with his friend's wife; but his heart now sank within him at the thought of how she might abuse another's ear with the same calumny; not Mr. Brown's, nor Selwyn's, nor Lotty's, but Lilian's ear. Had he been a wiser and a less honourable man, he would have known that he had it in his power to set himself right—and more than right—with Lilian, by simply revealing the cause of this woman's malice; but such an idea never entered his mind. He felt that there were overwhelming odds against him; and that, probably, though the first blow had missed its mark, he would undergo their onset that very night; but he had no thought of any resistance such as would compromise even the most cruel of his enemies. He had promised Lotty to "spare" her sister; that is, as he understood it, to make her no offer of marriage, since such a union must needs be utterly hopeless; and he had made a promise within himself to spare Lotty that is, not to imperil by any revelation—however such might excuse his own conduct in Mr. Brown's eyes—the reconciliation that had been effected between herself and her father. His foil, in fact, had the button on, while those of his antagonists were bare.

Mr. Brown of course took Mrs. Sheldon into dinner, while Lilian fell to Sir Reginald's lot, and Lady Selwyn to Walter's. The conversation, was lively enough, and though not very general, still, more so than on the last occasion when he had sat at that table; for the baronet's sallies were seconded by his aunt, who, as the merchant admiringly remarked, was "a host in herself, as well as a guest," a stroke of pleasantry that Sir Reginald applauded very loudly, and of which poor Lilian looked utterly ashamed. That the widow was "making the running" with the owner of Willowbank very fast indeed, could not be doubtful to any one that heard her; but, nevertheless, the whole company was taken by surprise by Mr. Brown's suddenly saying—apropos of the contemplated trip to Italy—"And why should not you come with us, Mrs. Sheldon?"

It had seemed to Walter, whom this speech had positively electrified, that Lilian was here about to speak; but Sir Reginald, with his quick, "Ah, why indeed?" was before her, and she said nothing, only cast a despairing look across the table to her sister.

"Well, well, that is a very tempting proposition, Mr. Brown, I own," answered the widow gravely; "but it will need a good deal of consideration."

That she intended to accept the invitation, no one present, except, perhaps, the host himself, who was very solicitous to extract an assent from her, had any doubt; but she declined for that time to give a definite reply. "It was a delightful idea," she said—"perhaps almost too pleasurable a one, it would be thought by some, to be entertained by one in her position"—and here she sighed, as though that allusion to her recent bereavement had set some springs of woe flowing—"but it would need very serious reflection before she could say 'yes' or 'no.' She would make up her mind by the next Sunday afternoon, when she had engaged to meet dearest Lotty in the Botanical Gardens at three o'clock."

"Dearest Lotty," instructed by a glance from her lord and master, promised to be punctual to that appointment, and expressed her hope that Mrs. Sheldon's decision would be in the affirmative. Most of this talk had taken place during dessert, and again and again Lilian, from the head of the table, had looked towards the widow with that significant glance, that even the youngest housekeepers can assume when they think that a change of scene will be desirable. But the other had steadily ignored it, and, in one of her endeavours to catch the widow's eye, Lilian caught her father's instead.

"Why should you be in such a hurry to leave us, my dear?" said he testily; "we are quite a family party; and neither Sir Reginald nor Mr. Litton are three-bottle men."

Of course, both gentlemen hastened to say that they had had wine enough.

"Very good," continued the host. "Then why should the ladies part company from us at all?—What say you, Mrs. Sheldon, to our forming ourselves into a hanging committee, and criticising the new picture that has just come home from the Royal Academy?"

"I should like it, of all things," answered she; "that is, if such an ordeal would be agreeable to the artist." It was the first time since their meeting that she had looked Litton in the face, and she smiled as she did so very sweetly.

"It is not a very good time to judge of a picture," observed

Walter ; not that he cared about that matter in the least, but because he saw that the proposition was, for some reason or other, distasteful to Lillian.

"But the less light there is, Litton, the more your blushes will be spared," said Sir Reginald gaily.

"Oh, there's plenty of light," returned the host ; "I have had reflectors contrived expressly to exhibit it. Come along, Mrs. Sheldon, and pass judgment."

And with that, he gallantly offered his arm to the widow, and led the way across the hall into the breakfast-room, where the picture had been hung. The gas apparatus which had been made to throw its beams upon the canvas, was soon lit, and certainly Walter's handiwork looked to the best advantage.

"There, madam, what do you think of *that* ?" inquired Mr. Brown admiringly. "The idea is Philippa, wife of what's-his-name, interceding for the lives of the citizens of what-you-may-call-it. The Joan which you have seen is to hang opposite, and I must say that a prettier pair of companion pictures it would have been hard to find."

"And when did dear Lotty sit for this beautiful likeness ?" asked Mrs. Sheldon, regarding the canvas with all the rapt attention expected in such cases.

"Why, that is the best part of the whole thing, my dear madam : she never sat at all ; the likeness is a purely accidental one."

"Dear me ! What ! he painted it only from memory ? Well, that is most creditable ; and also, I may add very complimentary to Lotty herself."

And now Walter knew that it was coming, that exposure and undeserved shame awaited him ; and also, though he looked neither to left nor right, but kept his gaze fixed upon the canvas, that all who stood by, save Mr. Brown himself, were aware of what was to follow.

"Memory ?" echoed the host ; "not a bit of it ! He had never so much as set eyes upon Lady Selwyn."

"Ah, you mean not *after* she was Lady Selwyn. Of course, Mr. Litton was well enough acquainted with Lotty's features, since he saw her every day when she was at Penaddon."

For a moment, not a word was spoken. Mr. Brown stared with astonished eyes at Walter, evidently expecting him to

speak ; but when he did not do so, the colour rose into the old merchant's cheeks, and his eyes gleamed fiercely at him from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?" inquired he roughly. "Have you been telling me lies, then, all along?"

"No, sir ; I have told you no lies," answered Walter calmly.

"At the same time, I confess with sorrow that I allowed you to believe what was not the fact."

"Then this is a portrait, is it, just like any other portrait?" cried the old man contemptuously. "You excited my interest by a cock-and-bull story, and obtained entrance into this house by false pretences. Nay, I may say you have picked my pocket——"

"O *papa*, *papa*!"

It was Lilian's voice, full of shame and agony, but the sound of it, usually so welcome to his ear, only seemed to make the old merchant more furious.

"Be silent, girl!" exclaimed he harshly ; and then, with some inconsistency, he added quickly : "What have *you* to say about it, I should like to know?"

"I was about to observe, that, so far from picking your pocket, *papa*, Mr. Litton would not take a third of the price you offered him."

"That is true enough ; but I have some reason to believe that this gentleman had an object to gain in being so liberal in his terms. Yes, sir, in acting with such marvellous magnanimity, you threw out your sprat to catch a whale ; though, as to your pretending to be a stranger to her ladyship, I cannot understand, indeed, why Sir Reginald yonder, and Lotty herself, did not inform me——"

"Well, finding him here, Mr. Brown," interrupted the widow, laying her dainty fingers upon his arm appealingly, "earning such large sums under your patronage, they doubtless hesitated to take the bread out of his mouth, as it were, by denouncing him as an impostor. It was a weakness in Reginald, no doubt, but I think, considering their old acquaintanceship, a pardonable one."

"Since such is your opinion, Mrs. Sheldon, I will forgive him," replied the old man. "But as for this gentleman—as I daresay he still considers himself to be, though, when a man

sails under false colours in humble trade, we have quite another name for him—this is the last time he shall set foot in this house. Have you nothing to say, sir, absolutely *nothing*, to excuse your having played me such a scurvy trick?"

There was a long silence. For the first time, Walter turned about, and threw a glance upon the witnesses of his degradation. Sir Reginald, as if ashamed to meet his gaze, at once cast his eyes upon the ground; Lotty, with her face buried in her handkerchief, was sobbing bitterly; but Lilian, white as marble, gave him back a look of supplication tender and earnest as that which looked out of the picture itself; only added thereto was an expression of heartfelt gratitude, as though the favour asked had been already granted.

"No, Mr. Brown," answered he, in a firm voice, "I have nothing to say."

"Then the sooner you leave this house, the better I shall be pleased," was the grim reply.

In the glare of the gaslight, he saw two faces, the recollection of which was doomed to haunt him long with a bitter sense of humiliation—one, his host's, full of honest scorn; the other, scornful too, but with the triumphant malice of a slighted woman. He passed out and before them both without a word, and into the hall, from whence he took down his hat and coat with his own hands, and left the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IT is not very easy, even to the best of us, to own we are in the wrong, even when we are so ; but to sit silent under unmerited reproaches, is to obtain a moral victory of the very highest order.

Walter Litton had been to blame in allowing his host to deceive himself as to the Philippa having been an accidental likeness of his married daughter, but he had done so solely in her interest ; the old merchant had laid great stress upon the undesigned coincidence ; had tacitly, in fact, almost acknowledged his coming upon the picture in the Academy as a providential arrangement to turn his heart towards a reconciliation with his exiled child ; and Walter, even if left to himself in the matter—and not, as we know he was, exhorted by another to concealment—would not perhaps have had the courage to undeceive him. It was a venial sin at worst, and had no selfish ends ; yet, not only had a selfish end been imputed to him, and had he been punished for it, but others twenty times more blameworthy, and who had profited by his offence, had stood by in silence, while he was condemned. It was, as we have said, the bent of Walter's mind, whenever the first gust of resentment had passed away from it, to seek for some palliation in those who angered him ; but in this case his charity could find no excuse for them. The old merchant himself, he did not blame ; it was only reasonable that he should have imputed to him a selfish motive for a deception which was otherwise inexplicable ; the reconciliation with the Selwyns had become so complete by this time, that he did not see "the join ;" now that the thing had been effected, the actual circumstances by which it had been brought about were forgotten ; and besides, it was painful to him to revert to them. Moreover, Mr. Brown had been as clay in the cunning hands of the widow, for whom it was evident he entertained a warmer feeling than

the aunt of one's son-in-law usually inspires. He was an honest old fellow, with some worthy qualities ; and the young artist did not forget, notwithstanding his late calumnious words, that he had shewn himself friendly disposed towards him.

Nor did Walter feel the least animosity against Lotty : that there was some soreness in connection with her conduct towards him was but natural, but it did not rankle ; he transferred, as it were, what wrong she had done him to her husband's account, to whom he was already so considerably indebted in that way. The menace which Sir Reginald had uttered when Walter had declined to give any promise as respected Lilian—a promise, by-the-by, which he had given to Lotty without the least compulsion—had been carried out to the uttermost. He could not but conclude that his ejection from Willowbank had been decided upon by Selwyn and his aunt long before it took place, and that it would have been accomplished that evening, somehow ; the exhibition of the picture had happened to furnish an opportunity, but, in any case, one would have been found. Curiously enough, his feelings towards his former friend were not so bitter as against the widow ; she had, it is true, obvious reasons for being hostile to him—first, because he had shewn himself indifferent to her ; and secondly, because she had matrimonial designs upon the old merchant, to which his presence would be more or less of an obstacle. He was not so ignorant of woman's nature but that he understood how those two causes of dislike—which to mere masculine sense would appear incompatible—were cumulative ; and so far he forgave her. But what he resented—nay, what he hated her for—was, that she, a woman, had joined with Reginald against Lilian. From what the latter had hinted, he knew that Mrs. Sheldon's designs upon Mr. Brown were most distasteful to his daughter, and he felt that they would not be encouraged by Sir Reginald, as they obviously were, unless some treaty had been entered into between the two relatives, the nature of which it was not difficult to guess. If Mrs. Sheldon should marry Mr. Brown, her influence with him would doubtless be used to the uttermost to prevent Lilian from marrying anybody, so that Sir Reginald, by right of his wife, should be his sole heir. Walter did not go so far even in his thoughts as to accuse them of speculating upon her death ; though she was certainly deli-

cate and ailing, and it was very doubtful if this expedition abroad would not do her more harm than good ; but it was clear that she was slipping into the hands of two persons, both of powerful will, and whose interests were diametrically opposed to her own. Moreover, she had acknowledged, with respect to one of them, that she looked forward with apprehension to bodily ailment, lest, through weakness, she should be unable to cope with him. "We have no friend in the world, Mr. Litton," she had said, speaking of her sister and herself, "but you."

This was the consideration that pressed upon Walter's mind, as he walked home that night from Willowbank, and pressed with such weight and urgency as made his own humiliation light indeed. That he loved Lilian, he no longer attempted to conceal from himself ; but it was at least with no selfish love. Many men, upon having had their social relations with a man like Mr. Christopher Brown thus summarily broken off, would have felt themselves justified in acting quite independently of him with respect to his daughter ; like *détenus* who have been harshly treated and imprisoned, they would have considered themselves no longer on parole. But it was not so with Litton. He was a man of sensitive honour, and he could not forget that the old merchant had admitted him to his house, whether as guest or artist, upon the tacit understanding that he would not abuse his position by wooing his daughter ; moreover, he had promised Lotty not to press a hopeless suit ; not to make Lilian still more wretched than she was by the confession of a love which could never be realized. He now knew, from her sister's lips, that she returned his love ; but yet it behoved him to keep his word.

His distress and anxiety upon her own account, however, were so extreme, that he determined to seek the advice of another as to some remedy for her position. Hitherto, he had held her as a sacred thing, aloof from others ; just as (it must be confessed) he had of old held Lotty ; and had never made her the topic of his talk even with honest Jack Pelter, although the latter was by no means ignorant of her existence, and had perhaps drawn his own conclusions with respect to the feelings that his young friend entertained towards her. Jack was not one to be curious in regard to his friend's affairs, and the last

man in the world to seek for information, where it was evident that confidence was withheld from him ; but he was also capable of taking in his friend's welfare an interest, we do not say more lively than in his own, for to *that* he was too often deaf and blind, but one which would even lead him to take trouble, which was the thing he hated more even than the hanging committee of the Academy. Of Jack's friendship Walter stood in no doubt whatever ; it was only of his power to aid him in this matter that he doubted ; and yet, in the present strait, he felt that even if no aid should be forthcoming, but only sympathy, it would be very grateful to him. It could not be said that any actual responsibility rested upon him, and yet he had a sense of something like it—of a weight that it behoved him to get another pair of shoulders, provided they were willing ones, to share. Bohemian as Jack was in his habits, and what is called "feckless" as regarded his own affairs, Walter had found his advice, upon those matters in which he had consulted it, very sensible and sound ; the only thing that made him pause, was the fear that Pelter might not handle this exceedingly delicate subject with due respect ; that the counsel he might receive would be couched in terms of raillery and ridicule, every word of which would have a barb for him ; for his heart was sore. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to speak with Jack. The opportunity was not long in coming, for he found his friend at home and alone, swathed in an old dressing-gown that might have suited the Grand Turk, had he been forced to pay his debts, a smoking-cap upon his head, and in his mouth, a pipe so short that it was a wonder it did not burn his beard. Such was the appearance of the oracle he designed to consult, while the source of its inspiration was indicated by a huge tumbler of whisky-and-water.

"What ! back so soon, my lad, from the rich man's feast, and with such an anxious brow !" cried Pelter. "Has his salmon, then, disagreed with you ? What says the proverb : 'Be not desirous of his dainties, and put a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite.' The German translation is, 'Put thy knife in thy mouth ;' but it's all one."

"Something *has* disagreed with me, Jack," answered Walter gravely ; "but it was not the salmon, nor yet the cucumber."

"Perhaps it was the company."

"Well, yes; it *was* the company, though how you came to guess it, is more than I can understand."

"Well, when a man comes home so early from a quiet dinner-party, and not intoxicated, it is manifest that he has been kicked out for some other indiscretion. There has been a quarrel, and probably about a woman."

"No, Jack; there has been no quarrel, only an unfortunate misunderstanding."

"Just so; and it has not been about a woman, but concerning a young lady, or an angel. You state the whole argument of the plot, whereas I only gave the synopsis."

"To oblige me, Jack, would you be kind enough to be serious for the next half-hour," pleaded Walter.

"The task is long, and, considering the world we live in, very difficult."

"If you have drunk too much whisky, Pelter, I will wait till to-morrow," said Walter with irritation.

"There is no such thing as 'too much whisky, my friend,' returned the other imperturbably, "for in that case the Millennium—which means ten thousand dozen—would have already arrived. But if you hint that I am drunk, that is a *suggestio falsi*—a most infamous calumny. I only hope to be so presently. In the meantime, I am as steady as the Three per Cents. Nevertheless, to oblige you, and under protest that the operation is necessary, I will dip my head in cold water." Whereupon, Mr. Pelter rose with dignity, and marching into his bedroom with unfaltering steps, performed the ablution in question, and came back with a towel in his hand, and dripping like a water-dog. "You arrested me on my way to happiness, Watty; but I have now retraced my steps, and am quite in a position to listen to your pitiful story."

"It is not pitiful as regards myself, at all," said Walter.

"It will be, if you don't take a pipe. I can't bear to see a fellow-creature without tobacco when I am smoking. That's right; secure complete combustion, and then fire away."

There were several pipes smoked both by listener and narrator, before Walter came to the end of his story. At first, his companion gave only so much attention as politeness demanded; but, as the tale proceeded, his interest seemed to increase, and every now and then was manifested by an observa-

tion or inquiry. When Walter described Selwyn's behaviour to him on the lawn, Jack chuckled aloud.

"Why do you laugh?" asked the other.

"Well, your friend was so very frank," said he. "'I have married one of this man's daughters, and I mean to have the money of the other,' was really too ingenuous."

"Don't call him my friend, I beg," said Walter bitterly.

"I obey you, my good fellow, very cheerfully. You will bear me witness, that, up to this moment, I have never said one word against Captain Selwyn; I have always respected your friendship for him, but I have long felt it to be misplaced. Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom"—for Walter had gone into details respecting matters at Willowbank—"may not be a pusillanimous cuss (since he fought at Balaklava) but he is a bad lot, that is certain."

"I am afraid he is, and yet not worse than his aunt Sheldon."

"His aunt Sheldon! Who is she?"

"Why, surely, I must have spoken to you of her before, as being the lady from whose house Sir Reginald was married?"

"You never mentioned her by name. There was a little veil, my friend, kept over all that happened during that expedition to Cornwall. I never sought to raise it, but I think at one time you had your reasons for being reticent about that matter. Without laying claim to any superhuman intelligence, it was plain to me that you were smitten very severely. Was it this widow that gave the wound?"

"No; it certainly was not; though, between ourselves, she tried to wound me. I should have thought this morning, that nothing would ever have induced me to mention such a thing; but the fact is, she is a most dangerous woman, as you shall hear." Then he went on to speak of the apprehensions which Lilian had expressed to him; of the evident alliance that existed between Sir Reginald and his aunt; of the designs of the latter upon the old merchant; and of those events of the past evening with which we are already acquainted.

"And what am I to understand are your present relations with Miss Lilian?" inquired Pelter, when the other had come to an end.

"I love her, but I have not told her my love; nor do I mean to tell it. I have promised as much to her sister."

"Upon the ground that such a declaration would make Miss Lilian more unhappy?"

"Yes."

"But are you sure that it would do so?"

"I think so, since our marriage is so utterly out of the question."

"It is unfortunate—mind, I don't say that you are wrong—but it is unfortunate that you are so scrupulous, since you thus deprive yourself of any pretence for interference; you cannot even speak confidentially to Miss Lilian herself."

"Oh I think I could do that," said Walter naively.

Jack smiled, but immediately resumed the look of judicial gravity which he had worn throughout the narrative.

"Well, you must warn her against this widow."

"She needs no warning, my dear fellow. My impression is, that she distrusts her even more than Reginald. At present, you see, the poor girl has her father to appeal to; but should this woman become her stepmother, or even gain a permanent influence over the old man, she would be utterly defenceless."

"Defenceless against what? You don't suppose they mean to take her abroad, and then, between them, to murder her for her money?"

"Heaven forbid! But they may kill her without intending it. She is weak and ailing even now; it is not change of scene, but change of society that she wants; cooped up with a tyrant, a slave, and an adventuress——"

"Why do you call this rich widow an adventuress?" interrupted Pelter sharply.

"There is only her own word for her being rich; she was certainly poor enough when I knew her, and what but poverty could induce her to lay siege to Mr. Brown?"

Jack smiled again. "There is no accounting for tastes, my good fellow; some ladies are very catholic in that way. Of course, it seems to you impossible that one who has made herself so agreeable to Walter Litton, should throw the handkerchief to any one else."

"There is no pretence of affection in the matter, Pelter. She fools him to the top of his bent, and that so openly, that it is plain she feels she has hooked him. It seems to me the height of cruelty to let that poor girl leave England in such company."

"But how do you propose to stop her? There is some ukase I believe, beginning *Ne exeat regno*, but I don't know where it's to be got."

"Of course, I can't stop her," answered Walter, taking no notice of the last suggestion, "nor, what is worse, can I stop this Mrs. Sheldon from going with her, though I feel she will thus be in the worst hands she could be in. I had no hope, of course, that you would be able to help me in the matter, but I was so sore about it, and so miserable, that I could not keep my wretchedness to myself."

"Poor boy, poor boy!" said Pelter softly. Then, after a little pause: "It is not certain, however, that this lady intends to join the party in their tour abroad."

"O yes, it is; she only pretended to hesitate. She is to communicate her decision to Lady Selwyn on Sunday. She made an appointment with her in the Botanical Gardens, for three o'clock."

"How do people get into the Botanical Gardens on Sunday?"

"My dear Pelter, why, by members' tickets of course. Do you suppose they climb over the railings, or pay sixpence for a refreshment ticket, as they do at Cremorne?"

"I didn't know," said Jack humbly. There was a long silence, during which Pelter pulled at his pipe with the gravity of a Red Indian at the council-fire.

"I suppose nothing can be done?" observed Walter dreamily.

"I am not sure, lad; still, I do think——"

"Think what? You have a plan in your head; I can see you have!" cried Walter joyfully.

"I felt I was getting bald," replied Jack calmly, "but I had hoped not so as to shew the brain. I have a plan it is true, but I don't know that it will succeed."

"But what do you think? I only ask you what you think?"

"Well, I honestly tell you, that I think Miss Lilian will marry a banker, about five years older than her father; that is how these things generally end."

"I did not ask you that question, Pelter; I asked you whether you thought it possible that this woman, Mrs. Sheldon, could be prevented from accompanying her abroad?"

"Why, yes, I think she could; that is, if you could only——"

"Only what? There is no sacrifice that I would not make—no trouble that I would not take, in order to accomplish that!"

" Well, then, if you could only get a couple of tickets for us two for the Botanical Gardens, next Sunday."

" My dear Jack, I could get fifty ! But how can that possibly help us ? "

" That remains to be proved ; but I believe it will. As to the ' How,' you must permit me to be silent upon that point just for the present."

" O Jack, if you succeed, how shall I ever be able to thank you enough ! "

" I don't know, I am sure ; it will be a great personal sacrifice on my part, no doubt, because I have always avoided such places on principle. And then there's another objection ; but there, in for a penny, in for a pound ; one should never spoil a ship for a pound of tar."

" What a real good friend you are, Jack ? But what's the other objection ? "

" Well, you know they won't allow a fellow to smoke in the Botanical Gardens."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS.

WALTER believed in his friend Pelter implicitly. He was one, he knew, who not only never fell short of his promises, but was the last man to suggest a groundless hope. As to what device he had in his mind for hindering Mrs. Sheldon from making one of the yachting-party to Italy, he would make no conjecture ; but he was confident that the design was seriously entertained. He knew, too, that Jack was serious in requesting him to be silent upon the matter ; but whether the self-sacrifice upon his friend's part was such as he had described it to be, he had grave doubts.

Those who were unacquainted with Pelter's character, or with the tenets of the class he belonged to, might well imagine that the talk of principle in such a matter as going to the Botanical Gardens was a mere joke, like his complaint of not being allowed to smoke there. But this, Walter knew, was not the case. Jack was a Bohemian of the first (whisky and) water. He hated society, and abjured all its pomps and ceremonies with as much earnestness as any young girl who "takes the veil." The latter sometimes becomes the Bride of Heaven, because an earthly husband has been denied her ; but Jack could have been admitted into the world of fashion if he had been so minded, and he had resolutely kept out of it. He would go to no party for which it would have been necessary to have put on evening-dress, or, as he termed it, his go-to-meeting clothes. He would dine at no board at which smoking immediately after the meal was objected to. He would as soon have thought of voluntarily putting his feet into "the Boots" of James II., used to correct the Covenanters, as into a pair of "polished leathers." He was quite incapable of understanding the feeling which prompts a conventional person to go to church in a high hat, in place of a wide-awake ; instead of merely laughing at it, he loathed it,

and imagined what is a mere mechanical act of "respectability," to be significant of baseness of mind. The sort of man who thought that religion had anything to do with the shape of a hat, was honest Jack's aversion. He stood, in reality, on high moral ground, only, all his social prejudices being *inverted*, he seemed, to the common eye, to stand very low indeed. Our views of mankind depend very much upon which end of the social telescope we apply to them. The true history of Life in Bohemia, though it has been once attempted, still remains to be written; it is a subject much too wide for these pages, but we may here observe of it, that its attractions are apt to decrease, even more than is customary, with years. Whenever I see a gallant gay Bohemian, I cannot help inwardly saying to him, what Metternich said to the young gentleman who had not learned how to play whist: "Ah, sir, what an old age are you preparing for yourself!" For it is observable of the whole Bohemian race, that when Time begins to tell upon them, they turn (like some wines, which, when drunk young, are very pleasant) a little acid. They are at no epoch, indeed, to be confounded with the great "Pooh-pooh" school, with whom nothing is new, nothing is true, and everything is a bore, and to which they are vastly superior; but they arrive by another road at much the same place. They have no wife, to be called such, and no home worthy of the name; they have been generous to women, in thought as well as deed; but women are not grateful for such generosity; and an old age without a tender tie is deplorable. To that old age, though not yet past his meridian, poor Jack was tending fast; and, what was worse for him, he had the good sense to know it. His very affection for Walter was perhaps all the stronger, because he knew that it would be short-lived; that is, that a spot would one day be reached from which their paths must diverge, after which every step would widen the gulf between them. For Walter was no Bohemian, and Jack was far too good a fellow to attempt to proselytise him. As for himself, however, he would die in the Faith; and though—or perhaps because—he had already doubts of the happiness it was capable of conferring, he clung to it with greater obstinacy than ever. Thus it was no small matter that would have induced Mr. Pelter to bow the knee to Baal, and present himself in an "all-rounder" hat and coat

of formal cut at the Botanical Gardens on a Sunday. The hat, indeed, would be purchased for the occasion: but as to the coat—"Do you think any of these will do?" inquired he of Walter, exhibiting to him the contents of his scanty wardrobe, which, to say truth, were rather of an artistic than fashionable make.

"My dear Jack, you look like a gentleman in anything," said Walter assuringly.

"You are very good to say so," replied his friend ruefully; "though it strikes me that you have paid me a compliment at the expense of my tailor."

But, nevertheless, Walter was right; it would have been impossible for any one of intelligence superior to that of a vestryman, to have mistaken Mr. John Pelter for a snob.

Whatever he undertook to do, he did thoroughly, and having in this case abjured one principle, he proceeded to abjure another by insisting on punctuality.

"We should be at this place before your friends," said he, "if my plan is to take effect."

"And may I now ask what that plan is?"

"No, my lad, if you would be so good, neither now nor ever; let it suffice you to note the result of it."

Walter was much astonished, but, of course, said nothing, beyond promising to avoid the topic.

At half-past two, they accordingly presented themselves at the Gardens. The main body of fashionable folks had not yet arrived; but a few promenaders were walking up and down the lawn, and the front row of chairs was fast filling with those who had come both to see and to be seen.

The two young men took their seats under a tree, from which they could watch those who entered by the chief turnstile.

"I shall know Lady Selwyn from your picture, I conclude?" observed Pelter.

"Well, I flatter myself you will; and as for Mrs. Sheldon, you may recognise her——"

"Hush!" cried Pelter; "there she is;" and, indeed, at that moment the widow entered the grounds.

"Why, how did you know?" was the question upon Walter's lips; but it was arrested by a glance at his companion's face, which had on the instant altered in a very remarkable

manner. His florid complexion had become quite pale ; his lips, generally parted with a slight smile, had closed together tightly ; and the expression of his eyes had grown severe almost to menace. "Let me have a few minutes' talk with this lady alone," said he quickly : and rising from his chair, he stepped down the long broad walk to meet her.

She was moving very leisurely, quietly scanning the row of faces, in search, no doubt, of Lady Selwyn ; her attire was faultless, her air full of that careless grace which seems to ignore emotion of all kinds as vulgarity ; when suddenly she dropped her veil, and turned as if to retrace her steps. She was not, however, permitted to do so alone ; before she had got ten yards, Pelter over-took her, and taking his hat off, as to an old acquaintance, at once addressed her, and then attached himself to her side. As to what he said, Walter, of course, could make no guess ; but whatever it was, the widow appeared to listen to it with grave attention, though exhibiting neither alarm nor surprise. Nay, when the end of the lawn was reached, instead of returning up it, like other promenaders, this pair betook themselves to a side-walk, and could be seen through the leafy screen evidently engrossed in talk. That Jack was "thorough" in his views of friendship, and energetic enough when once roused to action, Walter was well aware ; but that he should have thus sailed down upon a strange flag, and, as it were, piratically captured her, astounded him not a little. Was it possible, he had begun to think, that she was altogether a strange flag ? when, under the trellised gateway, there appeared two persons, whose advent turned his thoughts at once into quite another channel.

Lilian and Lotty had entered the gardens. The latter, of course, Walter had expected to see ; but the former's coming had been wholly unlooked for, and it filled him with an eager joy, which for the moment no prudent reflections could dispel. He had scarcely dared to hope to have speech with her before her departure abroad, or perhaps even ever again ; he had steadfastly resolved not to seek a meeting with her ; she should have, he had resolved, no further sorrow because of him ; he loved her, and she knew it ; but in leaving England, she should at least not have to break asunder an acknowledged tie. Such had been his resolute determination ; but now, as she came

slowly up the lawn with her beautiful face so pale and thoughtful, and her large eyes fixed sorrowfully upon the ground, his heart melted within him, and his resolutions with it. Her sister looked timorously from right to left, in search of her she had come to meet; but Lilian, it was plain, had no anxiety upon that account; her thoughts were deeper, and he dared to hope that they might be busy with him. Though they were to be parted, and for ever, was it not right—or if it was wrong, was not the temptation irresistible, since the opportunity thus offered itself—to say to her a few simple words of farewell? He rose from his seat, and made his way towards them. Lady Selwyn was the first to see him; he saw her start and tremble, and knew that she was pressing her sister's hand, and whispering to her that he was near. Then Lilian looked up, crimson from brow to chin, but wearing such a happy smile, and held out her little hand.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Litton." If the light in her eyes was not love-light, thought Walter, it was the very best imitation of it that female ingenuity had yet discovered. It seemed as if Lilian was conscious of this too; that a maidenly fear of having betrayed too much had seized her, for she added hastily: "We are both so glad, because we feel that we owe you reparation."

If Lady Selwyn was glad, she did not look so glad as she looked frightened. "There are so many people here," whispered she timidly; "let us cross the broad walk to the other side."

Indeed, their present locality, exposed to the fire of a hundred pairs of eyes and ears, was not one very suitable for explanations; whereas, upon the other side, there were no sitters, and but few walkers. So they crossed over.

"We have to apologise to you, Mr. Litton—all of us," continued Lilian with emphasis, "for the treatment you so unjustly received at Willowbank the other evening——"

"I beg you will not do so," interrupted Walter; "any allusion to the matter must needs give you pain, and therefore, give me pain; whereas, otherwise I feel no pain at all. It could not be helped, and I perfectly understood why it could not be so."

"It could be helped!" cried Lillian indignantly; "it was cowardly and shameful!——"

"Now, Lillian, dear," broke in Lotty pleadingly, "why go into that, when Mr. Litton says he perfectly understands how we were all situated."

"He was turned out of our house," said Lillian, "as though it had been *he* who had played a treacherous and dishonest part; while others, who were really to blame, made profit by it."

"I entreat that you will say no more about it," said Walter earnestly. "What alone distresses me in the matter is the reflection, that your father must needs have so poor an opinion of me; but that will all come right in time, and, even if it does not, I have the satisfaction of feeling that I have been of some service to him, though he does not know it."

"And to others who do know it, but have not acknowledged it," added Lillian indignantly.

"For my part, Mr. Litton," said Lotty tearfully, "I do acknowledge it, believe me, with all my heart. I am sure you have behaved most generously, and—and—like a gentleman." Lillian laughed a bitter laugh, which, however, from its very bitterness, was sweet to Walter's ears. "Let us hope," continued her sister, "that a time will come when it will be safe to tell dear papa the whole circumstances of the case; and then, I am sure, he will do full justice to you. I am afraid he must not know that we have met you here; and if Mrs. Sheldon should see us, I am afraid——"

"We shall have quite enough of Mrs. Sheldon for the next six months," broke in Lillian haughtily; "and what that woman may choose to say of us—of me at least—is a matter of the most supreme indifference to me. We were to meet here to receive her decision—about which she pretended to have some doubts—respecting her going abroad with us."

"She is here already, but she has a friend with her," added Walter quickly, as Lady Selwyn uttered a little cry of terror. "We can keep out of her way, if you wish it; and if my company is really a source of alarm to you, I will withdraw at once."

"Let us keep out of her way, by all means," ejaculated Lady Selwyn, "until you have done your talk."

"I shall not move an inch out of Mrs. Sheldon's way," ob-

served Lilian decisively ; and since she did not tell Walter to withdraw, he staid.

"And when are you to start for Italy ?" inquired he.

"We do not go to Italy at all, at least for the present, but to Sicily," answered Lilian. "Our first destination is Messina ; but our plan is to coast round the island. I have proposed that, in hopes Mrs. Sheldon may prove to be a bad sailor, in which case we shall leave her on shore"

"O Lilian !" exclaimed Lotty reprovingly ; "and you know that Reggie himself is never quite happy on board ship."

"We start on Saturday, I believe, from Plymouth," continued Lilian, without noticing this remonstrance.

"I trust the voyage may prove much pleasanter to you than you anticipate," said Walter mechanically, "and that your health may be restored by it."

"As to my health," sighed she, "I cannot say ; but if it be true that the bitterest medicine is often the most beneficial, it certainly ought to do me good. The thought of it is hateful to me ; nay, more, if there be such a thing as a presentiment, if misfortune is ever permitted to cast its shadow before it, then, indeed, will evil come of it." She shuddered, and drew her lace shawl around her, as though its fragile folds could give her warmth.

"Now, is it not childish of dear Lilian to go on like that, Mr Litton ?" urged Lady Selwyn. "I assure you this is what I have to listen to every day."

"If I could only do anything to give you the least comfort," murmured Walter beneath his breath.

"Indeed, you have done more for me, for all of us, already, than we deserve ; while your acquittal has been——"

"Good heavens ! there is Mrs Sheldon," exclaimed Lotty. "She is looking down the row for us ; I told her we should be there, you know. Had we not better go and join her ?"

"As you please," answered Lilian coldly. Whether from fear of the widow, or from a kindly impulse which prompted her to leave the young people alone for a few seconds, Lady Selwyn here left her sister's side, and crossed over to where Mrs Sheldon stood.

"I hope I may be allowed to see you when you return to England ?" said Walter softly.

"O yes—if I ever do return," sighed Lilian.

"For Heaven's sake, do not encourage such forebodings. For myself, I am no believer in them ; but the knowledge that you entertain them is itself a real misfortune to me. You have no friend, Miss Lilian—none—who has a greater regard for you, a deeper devotion to your interests, than myself."

"You have proved it, Mr Litton," answered she, in tones scarce above a whisper. "I would that it had been in my power to shew my sense of your good ——"

"Here is Mrs Sheldon, Lilian !" exclaimed Lotty. She pitched her voice in so high a key that it almost sounded like a warning, which perhaps the contiguity of the young couple had suggested to her ; for the fact was, although they themselves were ignorant of it, that they were standing hand in hand.

"How *are* you, my dear Lilian ?" inquired the widow pathetically. "It is quite an unexpected pleasure to see you here ; and I hope I may draw good auguries from it."

"Thank you, I am pretty well," returned Lilian icily.—"This is Mr Litton. There is no occasion for ignoring your old acquaintance *here*, I suppose."

Mrs Sheldon cast a sharp and piercing glance at Walter. The words "your old acquaintance" had a meaning for her which the speaker did not suspect ; then, as if satisfied with her scrutiny, she smiled, and held out her hand. "Mr Litton knows, I am sure, that nothing but a hard necessity compelled me to behave towards him as I did the other evening. His generous nature will forgive me for having sacrificed him for the good of others."

Walter bowed, but said nothing.

"We have all to make our sacrifices in that way," she continued. "I am myself, for instance, compelled to forego the pleasure of accompanying these dear girls abroad."

"What ! are you not going with us ?" inquired Lady Selwyn. "That will be a great disappointment to Reginald, I am sure."

"And I hope not only to Reginald," answered the widow, laughing. "These newly married young ladies think only of their husbands, you see, Mr Litton, which makes them seem sometimes almost rude."

"Indeed, I did not mean to be rude," answered Lotty, colouring very much. "Of course, we shall all be disappointed : and we had counted on your coming as almost certain."

"Well, I will tell you all about it, when we get home. I think it due to your good father to let him know at once the change in my arrangements—not that I wish to hurry Mr. Litton away, I'm sure."

"I was just about to take my leave," said Walter, "at all events."

"Well, you and I are to be left in England, you know, and will, doubtless, meet again," smiled the widow as she shook hands with him. She had really carried matters off exceedingly well, considering the hostile company in which she found herself, and that Lilian had not expressed one syllable of regret at her change of plan.

"Good-bye, Lady Selwyn," said Walter kindly, and as he pressed her hand, the ready tears rose to her eyes. She knew, poor soul, that *he* knew how she had no longer any will nor way of her own, and that, though she had injured him, he forgave her. As she turned from him, she took Mrs Sheldon's arm, and, though trembling at her own audacity, led her a few steps away.


"God bless you, Lilian!" murmured Walter.

"And God bless *you*!" was the whispered response; their hands met in one long pressure, and then they parted without another word.

Walter stood and watched till the three ladies reached the gate, where Lilian turned, as he knew she would, to give him a farewell look; and then, with a sigh, he moved away to seek his friend. But Mr. Pelter was no longer visible. He had doubtless taken himself home, to remove that badge of social servitude—his high-crowned hat; and Walter followed heavy at heart, but not without a keen curiosity with respect to the means which Jack had employed to alter the widow's plans. For that to Jack, strange as it might appear, Lilian was somehow or other indebted for her escape from that distasteful companionship, Walter had no doubt.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW HE DID IT.

S Walter had expected, he found, upon reaching Beech Street, that his friend had arrived before him. He found him walking up and down his studio with quick strides, without his pipe (which was itself a portent), and with his hands behind him, still gloved. Jack seldom wore gloves, but if compelled to do so, was wont to tear them off upon the first opportunity, as though they had been the tunic of Nessus.

"My dear Jack," said Walter, "is it really to the influence of your eloquence with Mrs. Sheldon that I am indebted for this great service? I heard her, with my own ears, tell Lilian that she had altered her plans, and would not accompany them to Sicily."

"To my influence—yes; to my eloquence—certainly not," returned Pelter gravely. "I used no honeyed words."

"Whatever words you used, I am most grateful to you, as Lilian too would say, did she know to whom she was indebted."

"It cost me something, lad," sighed Pelter, throwing himself into a chair—"something that smug sleek men declare they value beyond all else, and which is dear even to me—namely, Self-respect."

"I hope not, Jack; not for my sake, nor—nor any one's."

"Ay, but it was so, for I had to lie to her, and, what is worse, to threaten her. Fancy using threats to a woman!"

"But why should she fear you, or your threats either!"

"Well, that's too long a story to tell now. But don't you remember, Walter, how, at the beginning of this Willowbank business, and when we were speculating as to who had sent the offer for your Philippa, that I gave you a leaf of my life that you might take a lesson from it—how, when I was young, and honest and credulous—like yourself, I was once fooled by a woman? You know what Pope says about the sex, and that I don't go with him; but in this case he was right. Intrigue was the at-

mosphere of that woman's life, and men's hearts her playthings. But she had not the wit for the work, or she would never have lied except with her tongue ; as it was, she did so in black and white, and amongst others, to me. When we parted—when she flung me aside, like yonder glove"—and he cast one violently on the floor, "she asked me to give her back her letters ; but that was impossible, because I had burned them every one, before she asked me. Judging me by her own crafty, treacherous self, she did not believe me, and I took no pains to convince her ; since she chose, after all that had passed between us, to think me capable of a base revenge, I let her do so ; and to-day she suffered for it."

"Then you knew who this Mrs. Sheldon was, from the moment I mentioned her ?" observed Walter.

"I guessed it, lad. It was not the name I had known her under, but I heard that she had taken it ; and, besides, I recognised your portrait of her. As for her face, I should have known it, had I not seen it for twenty years, instead of ten, at the first glance. 'It can make no more mischief among men, so you have set it against your own sex, madam, have you ?' That shaft went home, I promise you."

"What ! you told her that ?" exclaimed Walter excitedly.

"Ay, and she knew who was meant. At first, she thought I was pleading my own cause, not yours ; but I undeceived her there. I told her that it might have been so once ; that years ago I might have loved some pure and simple girl, such as your Lillian, had my experience of woman-kind been happier in those days ; but as it was, that I had had no cause to trust in woman. She tried to fool me even then ; 'tis second nature with her, and first as well ; but she might as well (as I told her) have fawned upon the turnstile. Then I made her understand not only that her past, but that her present was known to me, even to the fact that, with her nephew's aid, she was angling for the rich merchant."

"What ! are you jealous, then, dear Jack ?" sighed she.

"I swear it made me laugh aloud to hear her."

"No," said I ; "I was not jealous, but resolute that her marriage with Mr. Christopher Brown should not take place—that I was acquainted with her plans, and meant, so far as he was concerned, to prevent them ; not, indeed, for his sake, but for

his daughter's ; and, to begin with, that she was not to accompany the family to Italy.' "

All this had been told in a quiet cynical manner, very different from Pelter's usual tone ; but when here, amazed, Walter inquired what right his friend had had to control Mrs. Sheldon's movements, he answered vehemently : " What right ? Why, the right of the strongest. Is it for *you* to have scruples—you, who affect to love this girl, and would have me preserve her—scruples against a serpent ? She is harmless now ; but, let me tell you, my snake-charming was not done by soft words."

" Indeed, my friend, you mistake me," cried Walter, " every one has a right to protect the weak against the wicked. I used the word as Mrs. Sheldon would have used it. Did she not resent, I should have asked, this interference with her arrangements ? "

" Of course she resented it ; she would have struck me dead, if looks could have done it. But she never questioned my right, nor even my motives."

" ' You would not have dared to speak to me like this,' was all she said, ' if you had burned those letters. It is not only women, then, who tell lies.' "

" ' Nothing that I know—or which I hold in my possession—shall be used to your disadvantage, madam,' replied I respectfully, ' if only you will be ruled by me in this particular matter. If otherwise, it will be my painful duty to place in Mr. Brown's hands a certain note—I think you will remember it —' "

" ' You coward ! ' she broke forth. ' If I had really kept that letter, she would have spoken truth ; and even as it was, lad, I felt like a whipped cur. Do you understand now, that I have done something more for you to-day than put on a tall hat ? ' "

" Indeed, indeed, I do, Jack," exclaimed Walter earnestly.

" Yes. But if our positions had been reversed, you feel that you could not have done as much yourself for me ? " answered Pelter bitterly.

" I did not say that, Jack. Good heavens ! do you suppose that I am reproaching you for sacrificing (as you said) your self-respect for my sake ? "

" Well, this much I must needs say in my own justification : it was not altogether for your sake, Walter. It was for this

young girl's sake also, whom I have never seen, except on canvases. If she is as good as she is beautiful, it was my bounden duty to defend her from that most unscrupulous of enemies, a jealous woman."

"Of course, I know Mrs. Sheldon is Lilian's enemy; but why should she be jealous of her?"

"Because Mrs. Sheldon failed where she has succeeded. Did she not fail, man, in winning your smiles down at Penadon?"

"She surely never told you *that*, Jack!" cried Walter.

"Certainly not; nor did you either; but yet I knew it. She must either fail or succeed with every man that comes her way. Well, *this* being so, I knew she would stick at nothing in the way of revenge; and, as it happens, interest and vengeance in this case went hand in hand together. She is as poor as a church mouse, as I conjectured, and is playing for a great prize in Mr. Christopher Brown, and could she have hooked the father, it would have gone hard with her step-daughter, you may take my word for it. Even as it is, the poor girl has, in my opinion, a very dangerous relative in her new-found brother-in-law; a Frankenstein, too, you should remember, lad, in some respect of your own creation.

"I know it," groaned Walter despondingly. "But what can I do? I can't stop Selwyn from going to Italy, as you have stopped his aunt."

"No; but you can do something else. Your patron at Wilowbank has paid you for your picture in advance; thinking, thereby, to close all connection with you, no doubt. You have the sinews of war, then why not carry it into the enemy's country!"

"Into the enemy's country?" repeated Walter. "I don't quite see what you mean."

"Well, in other words, then, here is a young painter, devoted to his profession, and with a pocket full of money; what is more natural, and right and proper, than that he should wish to visit Italy, the temple of Art, the very cradle——"

"By Jove, I'll go!" cried Walter, leaping to his feet.

"Of course, you'll go, though you needn't have interrupted a fellow in what promised to be a very pretty flight of eloquence. I shall miss you, of course, but then I shall feel that

you are improving your time. You must not confine yourself to picture-galleries, remember, but study the out-door effects of nature—the southern skies and seas. They say Sicily is a good place for filling your sketch-book. Suppose you go to Sicily first, and work your way up from the toe of the boot ——”

“My dear Jack, you are the best adviser that ever man had!” cried Walter with enthusiasm.

“That always seems so, when one’s advice happens to chime with one’s friend’s wishes,” observed Pelter composedly. “You must not be too sanguine, however, Sir Knight-errant; it seems to me that you have got your work cut out for you; even if you should save the young lady from the dragon, it will be a tough job to win her.”

“I do not think of winning her,” answered Walter earnestly; “if I can only be of use to her; only let her know, when far from home, and, as she supposes, friendless, that she is not without a friend; if I can unmask this man, and shew her dotting father what he is ——”

“You will ask no other reward,” interrupted Pelter dryly. “That is very wise, and very pretty; but everybody has not your disinterestedness. For myself, I feel that I have earned something at your hands, my lad; and I will thank you to brew me a little whisky-punch in the manner with which you are acquainted, and which the Faculty have recommended for my complaint.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEW LODGINGS.

IT is late October, but where Walter Litton has, for the present, taken up his abode, all nature still wears her summer dress. It is early morning, but the air, though welcome and refreshing, breathes on him soft and warm, as he stands on the balcony in front of his lodgings, and looks out on sea and shore. So different is the scene that morning is wont to present to him, that it verily seems to be another world. In Beech Street, he was fortunate, if at such a time the fog permitted him to see the sky. *Here*, the heavens are smiling on him without a cloud, and the sea reflects their smile on its smooth bosom. Above him, in serene stillness, rise high purple hill-tops, the very names of which he has not yet mastered, and which have still for him that mysterious charm which belongs to mountains which we see, and have not yet trodden. Below, is a broad highway—the Marina—at this hour, silent and deserted, but which will, later in the day, be thronged by equipages, vying with that of the Lord Mayor of London for splendour and bad taste. The streets, too, as yet are silent, although life has begun to stir in the alleys that feed them, and in which common shops full of fish, and fruit, and flowers, are already open. Out of windows hang to dry, things both rare and common, namely, clean linen and macaroni. But at the elevation at which our hero stands, not only do the beauties of nature appeal to his artist-soul with irresistible force, but even what is in reality mean and sordid, becomes picturesque. The result is, therefore, a picture that has no flaw, set in a frame of gold and azure. As the morning advances, the gold increases, flowing in, as it were, upon the picture itself; till, presently, he perceives why the tall houses looking seaward are so brown, and also the advances that may result in some climates from living in an alley, with only a strip of sky to light it. The growing glow and heat, indeed, are such as soon to drive our

hero from the balcony into his chamber, a scantily furnished room—as furnished apartments go in England—but wonderfully clean for Palermo ; the reason of which can best be explained by an introduction to the proprietor of the house, whose modest knock at the door has already been repeated without arousing the attention of his new tenant, absorbed by the beauties of sea and land.

A small, spare Sicilian, who now enters with the breakfast equipage, Signor Baccari, like his house, has a half-baked look, which might lead the uncharitable to suppose him averse to the use of water ; he *was* indeed averse, for he was a Sicilian, but for all that, he used it, being, as we shall hear, under a vow—though to no saint, for saints always stipulate for dirt—to do so.

“ Good-morning, signor. You have slept well, I trust ? ” said he, in tolerable English.

“ If I have not, it was no fault of the arrangements made for my comfort,” returned Walter warmly.

Baccari bowed, and shewed his teeth, white as the mice of any organ-grinder of his race.

“ To please the friend of one’s friend, is to please one’s self,” he answered. “ So soon as his letter reached me, said I to my wife : ‘ Scrub everything—the tables, the chairs, the floors.’ It was Signor Pelter’s weakness to have everything scrubbed ; and the weakness of those we love is to be respected.” If Signor Pelter had been dead, and his Sicilian friend had been referring to the fulfilment of his last request, his tone could not have been more grave and pathetic.

“ Your good-will is, I am sure, reciprocated,” observed Walter, smiling. “ When Mr. Pelter found I was resolved to visit Sicily, he said : ‘ I have one good friend there ; if you visit Palermo, ask for Signor Baccari, in the Piazza Marina. I spent a winter at his house in my young days, when I thought I was going to be a Raphael, a Murillo, a Tintoretto—three single gentlemen-artists all rolled into one.’ You remember his style ? ”

“ Is it possible to forget it ? Heavens, what a genius he had ! I have in my little room above-stairs his view of the harbour. It is the place itself ! He was ever upon the sea, you know—the deep, smiling, treacherous sea ! ” And Signor

Baccari crossed himself like lightning, and muttered something that sounded between a curse and a prayer.

"You do not like the salt-water, then, yourself?"

"I! How can you ask me who know what happened! I detest it! I abhor it! I fear it worse than the brigands. What! body of Bacchus, did he never tell you why—he who preserved my Francisco?"

"Never; he only mentioned that you and he were old friends."

"Is it possible? To be sure, he is not one to talk of his good deeds; if so, he would be always talking. And yet, look you, because he is a heretic, there are some who would hold him worse than a brigand. Bah! what stuff.—Forgive me, signor, for spitting on the ground. That was one of his prejudices, and it should have been respected. 'If you must spit, my dear Baccari,' he would say, 'spit in the sea.' He was so droll!"

"But how was it he saved your Francisco?"

"O sir, we were in a boat together—Francisco, then a little child, my wife, and I, all fools for being there—with the signor and a fisherman; out in the next bay to the west, yonder, which is more beautiful than this, folks say, or than the Bay of Naples. But to my wife, with the child in her arms, nothing seemed so beautiful as to watch the reflection of his innocent face in the deep deceitful sea. So, while she was leaning over the boat-side—it is terrible even to tell of it!—the boy leaped out of her arms; there was a little splash, and then all the light of our life was quenched for ever!"

"But your son was not drowned, for I have seen him."

"No; thanks to Santa Rosalia—and a heretic—he was saved. Our friend was with us, brave, agile, and who swims like a fish. Hardly had that little splash faded from our ears—as the knell of a death-bell dies away—when there was a big splash—that was Signor Pelter; O sir, I shall never forget it—'a header,' he afterwards called it; and he then comes up with the child in his mouth—I mean, in his arms, like a water-dog. It was nothing short of a miracle. What could I say to that hero, who had thus rescued our darling from the jaws of death? Nothing—nothing that could make him understand my gratitude! 'Oh, what,' cried I, 'noble English-

man, can I ever do for you or yours ?' 'Wash, my dear Baccari, wash a little occasionally, for my sake,' was his reply. Hence it is that our house alone, in all Palermo, is always water-flooded. 'You will die of the damp,' say the neighbours ; but we are not dead yet ; neither I, nor my wife, nor our good Francisco. Is it wonderful that we have done Signor Pelter's bidding, and are always clean ! Is it wonderful also that to me the sea is more terrible even than the brigands !'

"Are the brigands, then, so very alarming ?" inquired Walter. "I understood that you good folks who dwell in towns, at least were safe from them."

"Safe ! Holy Rosalia, nobody is safe !" answered the other, sinking his voice. "It is not safe even for us two to be talking of them. They have spies everywhere ; allies everywhere. Why, the Marina, yonder, is the only road in Palermo that a rich man dare take his pleasure upon. On all other ways—if he goes to Messina, for example—he must take a mounted escort. To think that a couple of miles out and in, is all that a man dare travel, here in Palermo, because of brigands !"

"My dear Mr. Baccari," said Walter, smiling, "it appears to me, since our friend Pelter never even so much as mentioned their existence, that you have got brigands on the brain."

"Pardon, signor ; it seems so, doubtless. Your breakfast is prepared."

It was evident that the feelings of the little lodging-house keeper had been wounded. In vain, before sitting down to his meal, Walter endeavoured to explain away his unfortunate observation.

"The Signor Litton is mistaken ; I am not out of my mind, as he has been pleased to imagine," was all that his apologies could for some time extract from his host. But presently, when Walter had explained to him that in England there were no brigands, absolutely none, and that, therefore, all reference to such unpleasant folks had for him an air of fable, he grew mollified.

"The signor, then, is blest in his country," was his grave observation ; after which, he inquired whether it had always been so favoured.

"Well, we had once robbers and outlaws," admitted Walter, "but certainly never in broad day, and in the neighbourhood

of our towns. There was Robin Hood, for example, centuries ago, whose band, however, was said to plunder the rich only, and not the poor."

"Ah, but *these* rogues, they plunder everybody," put in the Sicilian, once more astride upon his hobby; "though it is only when some great man has suffered that the affair is made public. My neighbour here, Loffredo, for example, a man as poor as myself, was taken up the mountain last spring, and had to pay so much for his ransom, that he and his family are beggared."

"I would have let them kill me first!" exclaimed Walter indignantly.

"Yes; but your wife could not—that is, if she loved you, as in this case. Loffredo refused to pay more than such and such a sum—which would not have utterly impoverished him—whereupon one comes down here, into the very next street, yonder, and brings something with him. 'Madam,' says he, to Loffredo's wife, 'do you recognise this *ear*?' They had begun to mutilate the poor fellow; and without doubt he would have died by inches, had she not sold all, and sent the required ransom. Again, in the early morning (for the poor fellow shrinks from shewing himself in the crowded streets), you may see any day Signor Spillingio with but one arm, and without a nose. The poor gentleman, captured by these scoundrels, had not the money at command to satisfy them; but his friends scraped together what they could, and sent it to the captain of the band. 'This is not enough ransom for a *whole man*,' he said, and thereupon reduced him to the pitiable spectacle which I have described. To bring one's children to want, or to lose life and limb, these are the hard alternatives; severe punishments to pay for a walk outside the city walls in spring-time, signor."

The good man's manner was so earnest, so pathetic, that Walter was tempted to observe: "I trust, Signor Baccari, that you yourself have never suffered from these villains, either in purse or person?"

"Thanks be to Heaven, never! But my Francisco was once taken; he was acting as guide to a French gentleman, and, fortunately, being so small a fish, they made use of him in another way; they sent him into the town to state the price of their

captive ; when, only think of it, Francisco himself was thrown into prison, upon the charge of treating with brigands ! The poor innocent lad ! Our rulers, you see, cannot put down these thieves ; but when a man is taken by them, they throw obstacles in the way of obtaining his liberty."

Walter could not but acknowledge that this was indeed a pitiable state of affairs, though, in his heart, he thought his host was unintentionally exaggerating matters. An element of humour also mixed with his compassion for Signor Baccari, whose fate it was to live on an island, where on the one hand the sea was forbidden to him, and on the other the land. It seemed impossible for any man, not absolutely a prisoner, to possess a more limited horizon in the way of movement.

Yet Signor Baccari was by no means dispirited by these peculiar circumstances of his existence ; his talk, when it was not upon the Brigand topic, was as gay and lively as the twitter of a bird ; no stranger would have had a better guide than he to shew him the lions of Palermo, and if Walter had cared for gossip, the private history of every household in the place would have been at his service, for Baccari knew it all. Francisco, his son, a lad of talent, seventeen or eighteen years old, was generally, however, Walter's cicerone. This youth was a study for a painter ; tall, slight, and sunburnt, with poetic grace in his every movement, and a certain cold indifferent manner that would have been contemptuous, but for its stateliness ; just as, when a king's air is cold and apathetic, we call it royal. He had no conversation, but since he could speak no word of English, that was of no consequence to Walter, who, on his part, possessed but a smattering of Italian, and no Sicilian save what he found in his pocket dictionary. Still, the two got on very well together, Francisco's eloquence of gesture doubtless making up for a good deal. But what made him especially valuable to Walter was that, unlike his father, he was passionately attached to the sea, and well skilled in the management of a sailing-boat. In vain had Baccari forbidden him, even when little more than a child, to tempt the treacherous smile of the Mediterranean ; he had ever taken his greatest pleasure upon it ; and now that he was a man—according at least to Sicilian reckoning—he was, in all except the name and the attire (which his father would not permit him to adopt), a sailor.

Littón, too, notwithstanding the attractions which Palermo offered to his artist's eyes, was seldom content to be on shore, nor even in the waters immediately about the harbour. It was daily his practice to take boat and put to sea; to escape from the landlocked bay, with its sheer steepes, until they seemed to dwindle before the presence of snow-capped Etna—a hundred miles away. The beauty of the scene thus left behind them was so transcendent that it would sometimes win Walter's gaze and hold it, despite of himself, in a species of enchantment; but for the most part, he would fix his eyes to westward, where nothing was to be seen for leagues and leagues but the blue sea, and watch for a certain coming sail; while Francisco lay at length, thinking of nothing beyond the orange which he was slowly slicing, as an English school-boy (only without his eagerness) would slice an apple. Ever and anon, Walter would intermit his watch upon the sailless sea, to take from the pocket of his sketch-book a printed extract from a newspaper, which he would read and read again, as though to assure himself that in the end his patience must necessarily be rewarded: "On Wednesday last, from Plymouth, the yacht *Sylphide* (Christopher Brown, Esquire) for Palermo." The weather had been charming; even the Bay of Biscay must have been tolerably tranquil during the passage of the voyagers, but still the *Sylphide* came not. It was unreasonable in Walter to be so impatient, for he himself had started from England on the Thursday, by Paris and Marseilles, for the same destination, and the iron horse was, of course, an overmatch even for the swift-winged *Sylphide*. Moreover, she might have touched at Gibraltar, or even at Marseilles itself. But there was still another alternative, the thought of which haunted Walter, blurred all beauties of land and sea to his curious eyes, and made him sick at heart. The voyage, in place of benefiting Lilian's health, might have injured it; the *Sylphide*, perchance, might have put back, or, making for some port, its passengers might have disembarked, and gone home by land. Thus, day after day went by in fruitless expectation; his sketch-book, notwithstanding the temptations that on every side appealed to him, remained almost blank; his hand refused its wonted office; it was only by forcing his mind into the shafts, and making *that* draw, in the shape of acquiring the Sicilian language, that the time could

be made to pass for Walter at all. Making every reasonable allowance for probable delays, the yacht was now a fortnight behind her time, when, on a certain evening, just as their own little sailing-boat, far out at sea, had, as usual, put about for home, and Walter, sunk in despondency, was thinking whether it was worth while to remain in Sicily at all, Francisco touched his elbow, and, in his cold indifferent tones, observed : "Inglese sheep." Walter started to his feet, and gazed to westward ; there was many a white sail studding the blue deep, as stars the sky, but he noticed no addition to their number.

"There," said Francisco, nodding lazily towards the extreme horizon, where something like a puff of smoke was barely visible ; "Inglese yat."

His sharp and practised eye had detected something in the shape of the sail which announced at once her class and nationality.

"Let us put back, and meet her," exclaimed Walter eagerly, thinking not of the yacht, but Lilian.

Francisco opened his almond eyes a little, the only expression of wonder he ever allowed himself. "Why so, Signor ? when with the breeze she must needs be in Palermo before us."

So they held on their course, while the "Inglese yat" fulfilled Francisco's prophecy by gaining on them hand over hand. For the rest of the voyage Walter had no eyes except for her. What was the flaming glow of sky and sea, compared with that first gleam which glittered on the sail that brought his Lilian from the under-world ! What was the purple tint of evening upon the mountain-sides, to the rose-coloured dreams of love ! On she came, the yacht, ever nearer and larger, till it overtook their little craft. Walter had no need to read the name that was written in golden characters upon the bows, to know it was the *Sylphide*. An instinct seemed to assure him of the presence of the treasure that was being carried past him—of the neighbourhood of her he loved. From under his broad hat he scanned the deck with furtive glance, though, indeed, there was but small chance of his being recognised. No newspaper had recorded under the head of "Fashionable Intelligence," Mr. Walter Litton's departure from Beech Street, Soho, for Sicily. By all on board who knew him, he was thought to be hundreds of leagues away, and by all save one—perhaps even by her—

to have given up the object of his life as unattainable. But he was there close at hand, if not to win, at least to watch over and defend his Lilian. She was not on deck; nor did he expect her to be, for the evening air was chill. Sir Reginald alone, besides the members of the crew, was visible. He was standing in the bows, with a cigar in his mouth, looking intently towards the town, which they were now rapidly approaching. To judge by his frowning brow, his thoughts were far from pleasant ones, but they would have been darker yet had he known that the light bark within but a few feet of him, and on which he did not even waste a glance, carried his whilom friend to the same port.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DANGER.

AMONG many things—but all connected with one tender topic—that troubled Walter's mind, as his boat followed the English yacht that evening into Palermo harbour, and then lay at a prudent distance from her moorings, to mark who should leave her for the shore, was the question of conscience : " Have I a right thus to play the spy ? " Here were an English gentleman and his family, come abroad for health or pleasure, and was it fitting that they should be dogged and watched by one who, if not a stranger, had (though certainly through no fault of his own) forfeited the right to be considered as a friend of the family. Did not this very necessity for concealment on his part itself imply a certain meanness ? What would be the judgment of any disinterested person upon such underhand proceedings ? What must Francisco, for example, think ? to whom he had given his orders to keep the boat in the shadow of an Italian steamer that happened to be anchored near the station which the *Sylphide* had taken up, and consequently afforded a convenient place of espial. Probably, Francisco, engaged at that moment upon what was very literally a supper of herbs, which, with some blackish bread, he had just taken out of his pocket, and which had already surrounded his beautiful head as with a halo, with an atmosphere of garlic, did not think much about it ; yet, even in the presence of Francisco, Walter felt ashamed. He remembered a certain argument he had once held with Jack Pelter upon the subject of anonymous letters, in which he had contended that under no possible circumstances could a right-minded, honest man—far less a gentleman—be justified in writing one. " What ! though no other means of redressing wrong, or warning an innocent person of some peril, should suggest itself ? " Jack had inquired ; and he had answered : " No ; not even in that case."

The surprise he had experienced at hearing his friend express

a contrary opinion—for Pelter's nature was, he knew, ingenuous to a fault—had impressed the circumstance upon him, and it now recurred to him with particularity. "Your argument, if pushed to extremity," Jack had replied, "would imply that nothing but straightforward conduct should be used, no matter against whom we may be contending; that in savage warfare, for example, we should employ no subtleties, nor even take advantage of the cover of a tree; and that, against criminals, we should scorn to call to our assistance the arts of the detective."

"The profession of the detective is one authorised by law; but what is called an amateur detective," he had replied, "is one in love with deception for its own sake, and therefore hateful to every honourable mind."

"But if one is persuaded that a crime is about to be committed, it is surely the duty of every man to avert it by such means as lie at his disposal. It is easy, indeed, to imagine a case—no personal advantage, of course, of our own being involved in the matter—where almost *any* means would be justifiable."

It was curious enough that an aimless talk carried on in Beech Street, over pipes and beer, should thus recur to him with such force and vividness; but perhaps it may be that no idle word, even spoken in jest, but bears some fruit in this world, as we are told it will do in the other. At all events, Jack's opinions which, when they were uttered, had failed to convince his opponent, now gave Walter comfort in affording him arguments of self-justification. True, in this case, he had no cause to suspect that any wrong, far less any crime, was about to be committed; yet Lilian's expressed apprehensions, combined with his own estimate of Sir Reginald's character, did give him considerable, though vague, anxiety on her account, and did afford him at least a colourable pretence for playing this clandestine part of guardian angel. And, at all events, he could honestly affirm that self-interest in nowise moved him in the matter. It was not to win her for himself that he was acting thus; she seemed as far out of his reach—and as adorable—as any saint seems to her worshipper; and if sacrilege was threatening her, it was his duty to avert it. It was perhaps fanatical in him to imagine that any such was being meditated; but if so, there was no harm done in his keeping watch over her, thus unknown and afar.

As soon as the yacht had come to anchor, he saw Sir Reginald go below, and presently reappear in company with a lady, veiled and cloaked, whom he concluded to be Lady Selwyn. They got into a boat with some luggage, and were rowed ashore, not to the Dogana, as he expected—Sir Reginald was not a man to submit to the inconvenience of a custom-house, if money could ransom him—but at Porta Felice, whence they drove in the direction of the Marina. After their departure, Mr. Christopher Brown came upon deck, and walked slowly up and down with his cigar, enjoying, doubtless, that first opportunity of a level promenade ; but Lilian did not make her appearance. Walter did not wonder that she had not gone ashore with her sister, shrewdly guessing that, after so long a companionship with Sir Reginald, she found his absence more enjoyable than the land ; but it did surprise him that, on a night so mild and tranquil, she did not come on deck to enjoy the glorious panorama that for the first time offered itself to her Saxon eyes. A light in the windows of the stern-cabin served to mark her shrine. It was still so early, that it was unlikely she was weary ; so, therefore, she must needs be ill. Yet, in that case, Sir Reginald would surely have procured medical advice ; and he did not return.

There seemed nothing to be gained by watching longer, yet Walter remained for hours, long after the owner of the *Sylphide* had retired below, till the sky grew black, and the stars came out above the mountain-peaks. Then the patient Francisco, duly guerdoned for his long vigil, put him on shore. As he walked towards the Marina, he saw a tall figure standing under the porch of the *Hôtel de France*, which he once more recognised for the ex-captain of dragoons. Sir Reginald and his wife had established themselves, it seemed, within a few doors of his own lodging.

That night Walter slept but little ; his brain was busy with guesses at the cause of Lilian's non-appearance on board the yacht. In so fair and strange a clime, it seemed so inexplicable that curiosity should not have induced her to come up on deck, unless she was really too unwell to do so. When he fell asleep it was only to have his apprehensions embodied in grotesque and hideous dreams, in which, Lilian was always the victim, and the captain her destroyer. In the morning, his

first movement was to the window, from whence he could command but little of the harbour, yet that little comprising something of what his eyes most yearned for—the delicate spars of “the Inglese yat,” standing out against the background of a purple hill. For many an hour yet, it was in the highest degree improbable that Sir Reginald would be stirring; still, he resolved to keep within doors, and thereby avoid the risk of recognition. He had somehow persuaded himself that his usefulness—if it was fated that he should be of use—to Lilian would be invalidated, should his presence at Palermo become known. As to the fact of his being resident in the town transpiring by other means, it was not likely that any one should mention the name of so unimportant an individual as himself; who did not even patronise an hotel. At the same time, he thought it as well to secure Signor Baccari’s silence upon this point, whose tongue was apt to be eloquent upon all subjects from the least to the greatest; while his son, Francisco, on the other hand, never opened his mouth but to admit a cigarette or a strip of macaroni. As it happened, the master of the house did not put in his usual appearance that morning at Walter’s breakfast-table, some business having taken him into the town betimes. Late in the afternoon, however, when the Marina was beginning to fill with equipages, he returned, even more radiant than usual.

“I have news for you,” said he to his lodger. “A great Milord has arrived from England, richer than any that has appeared this season. The hotels, it seems, are not good enough for him, for he remains—he, at least, and his daughter—on board of his own ship, which is fitted up like a palace. He is something tremendous; the whole town is talking of him.”

“His name?” inquired Walter, amused by this magnificent description of the self-made merchant.

“His name is Brown: yes; Milord and Milady Brown. Their ship is called the *Sylphide*. You can see a portion of it from the window. It is, I don’t know how many tons—perhaps a thousand.”

“Scarcely so many as that, Mr. Baccari,” said Walter laughing. “We have seen the whole of it—Francisco and I—last night. We met it coming into harbour. Did he not tell you?”

"*He* tell? Not he. He is a good son; but he does not talk. I sometimes think that the brigands frightened his voice away, when they got hold of him a year or two ago. What a prize Milord Brown would be for those rascals! How they would coin his blood, if they got hold of him! He is wise to remain on board ship."

"But they could not hurt him in Palermo, I suppose?"

"No, no; not in the town. But if he should take a fancy for pleasure-trips, were it only to ascend Monte Pelegrino, let him have soldiers with him, and plenty of them."

"It seems to me to be a most discreditable thing that you good folks in Palermo should be kept prisoners within your own walls."

"Doubtless it is discreditable; but it is better to be a prisoner than to lose your skin. It is safe enough on the Marina here, driving up and down."

"You are easily satisfied," answered Walter, laughing.

"Yes; contentment is a blessing, signor. I look out" (he was standing at the window), "and see these carriages, and though they are very fine—probably the finest in the world—I say to myself: 'Do not be envious, Baccari. For fivepence, you can hire something to carry you up and down, which, though not so highly decorated, serves your purpose equally well.' Ah! there are some new faces—your compatriots, signor—a handsome man, though not so good-natured-looking as a husband should be; and a charming wife. They form part of the suite of Milord Brown, and are staying at the *Hôtel de France*. Do you know them?"

"Yes; I know them," answered Walter, who, standing behind his host, could watch the passing carriages, secure from the observation of their inmates; "but I do not wish to be recognised. You can keep a secret, Signor Baccari?"

"For a friend's friend, yes," replied the little lodging-house keeper theatrically. "The signor does not wish it to be known that he is in the town?"

"Just so. It is important that that gentleman should not know it."

"The *gentleman*!" answered the other, with a comical look. "I see!"

"I don't want either of them to know it," returned Litton,

with a stiffness that was utterly thrown away upon his mercu-
rial companion. "They are not the suite of Milord Brown, as
you call him, but members of his family."

Sir Reginald did not certainly resemble a valet—even the
best specimen of a gentleman's gentleman would have suf-
fered by contrast with his haughty and supercilious mien, as he
leaned back in the carriage, and stared about him. It was
strange how he had lost his once genial smile since the sun of
prosperity had risen upon him; perhaps he no longer thought
it worth while to wear it, now he had gained his object—the
pale and timid-looking girl that sat beside him, and to whom
he seldom vouchsafed a word. The carriage, which had been
driven towards the town, did not return up the Marina, and
Walter rightly concluded that it was bound for the harbour,
and might perhaps return with Lilian and her father. And so
it proved. In less than half an hour, the same equipage came
slowly up the Marina with two more occupants. Lilian, with
her sister, now occupied the front seat; her appearance was
greatly altered since he had seen her last; she was not less
beautiful than of yore, but her beauty was of another type—
that of the hot-house flower; a cushion was placed behind her
head, and her large eyes, as they turned languidly at her father's
voice, looked very weary. Would they have lit up, thought
Walter, if she could have known that at that moment she was
passing beneath his window: and that his gaze was furtively
devouring her? Was it possible that the sea-voyage alone
could have worked thus harmfully with her? Or was this change
not rather owing to irksome companionship, to the knowledge
of the tyranny that was exercised over Lotty, and to the ab-
sence of any one who could sympathise and make common
cause with her? Nay, might not even the consideration, that
a certain true-hearted friend (as she, at least, knew him to be),
one Walter Litton, was separated from her by wide seas, and
probably for ever, have helped to pale that fair cheek, and dull
those bright eyes! As the carriage rolled away, his gaze dared
not follow it, for it must needs have met that of Sir Reginald,
whose glance shot hither and thither with contemptuous swift-
ness, unless when spoken to by his father-in-law, when his face
at once assumed the air of respectful attention. Walter knew
him well enough to feel, not only that he had not schooled him-

self to such unwonted humility without an object, but that he must also deem the object attainable. Sir Reginald had hated exertion even in his college days, and still more self-denial; but when the prize had seemed of sufficient value, he had gone in for as severe training as any devotee of *car*. He was one of those men who are always saying to themselves (instead of "Is it right?"), "Is it worth my while?" and who act accordingly. Undoubtedly, however, Walter was thinking hardly of him. It is not to be supposed, even though his looks might shew ill-concealed disfavour towards his sister-in-law, that he was speculating upon her indisposition, or general delicacy, as likely to end in her death, and therefore in his own aggrandisement; it is more probable that he simply disliked her because he knew that she had found him out, and resented his influence with her father. Again, and still again, did the carriage of Milord Brown and family pass Signor Baccari's house, amid an ever-increasing throng of similar vehicles; the crowd of sight-seers on foot was also larger than was customary, and among these Walter could see that the new arrivals used no little excitement. It was not unusual for an English *ght* to put into Palermo harbour, but it was evident that some especial interest attached to the proprietor of the *Sylphide*; whether on account of that report of his vast wealth, which had already reached the ever-open ears of Baccari, or from the beauty of his two daughters. Since this was so, since even in a foreign town, and as an utter stranger, Mr. Christopher Brown and his belongings were of sufficient importance to make such a sensation, was it not the very height of folly in one like himself—an unknown and penniless painter, thought Walter, with a sudden pang—to nourish hopes in connection with Lilian? He acknowledged to himself that it was so; hope—that is, a lover's hope—was out of the question for him; but that he might be of some service to her, he knew not how, against some danger, he knew not what, of that he had still some hope. As if to make up for his absence at his lodger's morning meal, Signor Baccari spread Walter's supper-table that evening with his own hands.

"Well," said he, "you saw all your friends. How beautiful are the young ladies! How prosperous looks Milord! How bold and gallant the young gentleman his son-in-law! He is a soldier, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is a soldier," answered Walter—"a man who has served with great distinction in the war."

"But yet not a favourite of yours, signor?"

"How do you know that?" inquired Walter quickly.

"I merely judged from your countenance—which is Italian in its frankness, rather than English—as he drove by. You would not be discontented, I was about to ask, if ill luck should happen to these compatriots of yours?"

"Ill luck? I don't understand you. Most certainly I wish none of them harm; while, as to some of them, the ladies, for example, I would rather—ininitely rather—that the ill luck, as you call it, no matter how ill it may be, should happen to myself rather than to either of them."

"The signor is very gallant," answered the Sicilian, shaking his head. "But no man is prepared to die for more than one woman—at least one woman at a time."

"To die?"

"Yes, signor, even to die—for it may come to that. Listen to me a little." The lodging-house keeper's tones had suddenly become very grave. "You are Signor Pelter's friend, and therefore mine; nay, you are my friend and my son's friend on your own account. Well, you asked me this morning, could I keep a secret. Let me on my part ask you the same question: Can *you*?"

"Certainly I can," answered Walter, more astonished by the gravity with which the other put the question, than even by the question itself.

"That is well, since, otherwise, what I am about to say, would, if repeated, cost me dear.—On the Marina this morning, beside the carriage-people and the good company, there were some queer folks, dressed as fine, mayhap, as the rest; but—brigands!"

"Brigands on the Marina; impossible!" The idea appeared to Walter about as incongruous as highwaymen in Rotten Row, or on the West Cliff at Brighton.

"It is nevertheless true, signor. They scent the carcass afar off like vultures, but they are more audacious. They have spies also everywhere. The arrival of Milord Brown reached their ears, no doubt, almost as soon as mine; and they have already identified him."

"Identified him?"

"Well, yes ; in a case like this, where so much is involved, it would not do to make mistakes, you see. Such things do occasionally happen. They have caught the wrong Milord before now. An encounter with the king's troops is not to be hazarded for nothing. These gentry like to be sure of their ground."

"But what have the king's troops to do with Mr. Brown ?"

"Well, he would hardly be so rash, I conclude, as to move without an escort. On board his ship he is safe, of course, but in no other place. If you are his friend, you had better let him know as much, that is all."

"But the whole story will appear to him an absurdity. He will ask for the proofs of his danger—for the authority that it exists."

"And that, signor, you have given your honour not to reveal. In confidence, however, the case is this. My Francisco, as I told you, was once taken prisoner by these scoundrels. During his captivity, he learned not a little of their private ways. There is a certain freemasonry among them, by means of which, for example, they recognise each other to be gentlemen of the same profession—the eyes to the left, and a tap of the head, like this. Well, my Francisco was on the Marina yesterday. He is not a great talker, but he has quick eyes—and he saw something."

"I should like to hear what he saw from his own lips," said Walter quietly, beginning for the first time to believe that the thing was serious. Baccari was not only a gossip, but had a capacious swallow for the marvellous ; whereas Francisco's information—the little, that is, he had ever condescended to impart—had always proved to be correct.

"No, signor ; I cannot permit that," was the Sicilian's unexpected reply. "I have already gone for your sake and that of friendship as far as I dare go. My boy must be able to swear by the Virgin that he never breathed to you one syllable of all this. It is he who will be suspected, you understand—not I—if you should think it well to give Milord Brown a warning."

"I see," said Walter thoughtfully. "Then I am to take it in real earnest, that it is your opinion and Francisco's that the

brigands are plotting to seize my friends, with the view of exacting ransom?"

"By Santa Rosalia, so it is. If Captain Corrali catches them, they will have to pay him handsomely for their lodging."

"Corrali? Then you know the very man, it seems?"

"Not I," answered the other hastily. "I know nothing. Even what I did know is mine no longer; it is yours."

"You have no advice to offer in addition to this meagre information?"

"Advice against the brigands! Heaven forbid. I have said more than I ought to have done already, in the bare fact. You must act as it pleases you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CHASE IN THE CALM.

THE information—if such a hint of danger could be called such—that had thus been given by his host to Walter was indeed astounding, but it was not incredible. Short as was the time he had himself been in Palermo, so many and so extraordinary had been the stories he had heard narrated of the vigour and audacity, as well as of the crimes, of the brigands who haunted its very gates, that he was constrained to admit at least the possibility of this new scheme of outrage. His informant, however timid and credulous, had undoubtedly—through his son Francisco—exceptional opportunities of information upon the matter in question; and, moreover, it was pretty evident that he had not told all he knew. The fact that brigands had been even interchanging signs with one another, as the occupants of Mr. Brown's carriage passed by, was itself alarming; but in all likelihood there had been much more of particularity in the affair than Baccari had stated. No captive worth the trouble of taking had as yet fallen into brigand hands that season; and no doubt, like the wolves after long famine, these wretches were emboldened by necessity, and more apt even than usual for any daring deed. The wealth of the English merchant had probably been much exaggerated to them, and would afford a tempting bait. The time in which they had acquired even that much of information respecting him was, however, so extremely short, that, notwithstanding their employment of spies—which was well known to be the case, and who were suspected to exist even in the very hotels at which the proposed victims lodged—it seemed to Walter inexplicable; in his perplexity, he found himself inventing the wildest theories to account for it; among them, even the notion that Sir Reginald himself had had a hand in the matter crossed his troubled brain. On reflection, however, he admitted this idea to be as monstrous as it was unjust; for how could Lotty's

husband, even if it could be shown that it was to his advantage to get his relative kidnapped—which it clearly was not, seeing the ransom must evidently come out of his own pocket—have been able himself, an utter stranger in Palermo, to enter into a nefarious treaty with the brigands of the mountains? The fact of Walter entertaining such a thought even for an instant was, however, a curious proof of the hostility with which he now regarded his quondam friend—of the profound contempt which he entertained for his character; the reason of which was not so much what he knew of him—though he knew much that was evil—as that mistrust of the baronet with which Lilian's instinct had inspired her, and which she had communicated to him. Of Lilian, however, at present, and in connection with the brigand question, Walter was not thinking; it was rare, indeed, to find the banditti encumbering themselves with female captives, the possession of whom must needs hinder them from making the rapid marches which pursuit so often compelled. Nor did he greatly concern himself with the personal safety of Sir Reginald: his anxiety was solely upon Mr. Brown's account; partly because any outrage such as was contemplated would fall on the worthy merchant, being what he was, with especial severity (Walter had not forgotten the hospitality and kindness he had manifested towards him in old days), but principally because of the distress with which such an event must needs afflict his daughters.

What course, however, to adopt, in order to put him on his guard without permitting him or his to guess from whom the friendly warning came, was a difficult problem. Any hint directly from himself was out of the question; Walter was firmly resolved—unless an opportunity of doing some great personal service should be vouchsafed him—to keep his proximity to them unknown to any of the party; and, moreover, any interference on his part was certain to have a base motive assigned to it, by at least one member—and he the most influential—of the family. In a word, either his warning would be disregarded as a mere pretence for regaining lost favour, or it would be credited at the expense of his own character. It might have been fortunate that he was able to afford them the information, but how should he explain his presence at Palermo, his pursuit of Lilian across the seas! Under the circumstances,

he decided to do nothing for the moment, but to keep, through Baccari, a strict watch upon the movements of Sir Reginald at the hotel. It would be by that means easy to find out if the party contemplated any expedition without the town, and in that case he would send them warning of its peril.

It seemed, however, as though Milord Brown and his belongings were well content with such objects of interest as Palermo itself afforded. He and his two daughters were generally to be seen during the fashionable hours driving up and down the Marina, and at other times, when the weather was comparatively cool, visiting the picturesque and ancient churches, or making purchases at the quaint old shops. The two girls were both greatly altered from the day on which the young painter had seen them first, and altered for the worse; but the change was of a different kind. In Lotty's case, the beauty of youth was dimmed by sorrow and disappointment; her illusions had been rudely destroyed; in her secret heart, she doubtless knew that she had risked, and almost lost, her place at her father's hearth, for an unworthy object; the man that had once been in her eyes a hero, nay, a demi-god, had shrunk down to mean dimensions; her impassioned lover had become a faithless husband, a tyrant, too, of whom she stood in fear. Perhaps her happiest moments were those thus passed in the society of those who had once been all in all to her; while he who had usurped their place in her heart—and lost it by his own harshness and infidelity—strolled about the town in his own fashion, and followed his own devices. Lilian, too, it was plain, was a sufferer, whether from mental or physical causes, but her beauty seemed enhanced rather than diminished by the sad experience. Languid and listless she might be, but the listlessness and languor were not those of a fine lady; it was the idea of the public that she had come to Palermo as a last chance for strength and life; and pity and admiration were the tributes paid to her wherever she moved. In reality, though far from well, she was by no means so ill as these good folks supposed her to be; and what ailed her she kept to herself. Lotty's eyes were often red with irrepressible tears; but Lilian shed none, though she mourned in secret the unhappy condition of her sister, and the influence which Sir Reginald exercised over her father. It appeared to Walter, however,

who watched the proceedings of the little party with the utmost interest, and as closely as the necessity of keeping himself out of their sight permitted him, that this influence was on the wane. Not only, as we have said, did Sir Reginald take his pleasure for the most part independently of the rest of the party, but, when in company with them, the behaviour of the old merchant towards him was far less cordial than of yore; he generally addressed himself to his daughters, rather than to his son-in-law, and received the conciliatory speeches of the latter with less outward signs of satisfaction than were due (as one would have thought) to a baronet of the United Kingdom. The cause of this, as Walter shrewdly suspected, was, that during the close companionship inseparable from life on shipboard, Sir Reginald had revealed more of his true character to the old merchant than he had intended to do, and perhaps than he himself was aware of. Nothing is more agreeable in society, it is said, than "a natural manner;" but then we must make quite sure that our nature is itself agreeable before cultivating it.

Since Walter's host had been so mysteriously communicative to him respecting the designs of Il Capitano Corrali—as the "principal robber" in those parts was familiarly yet respectfully called—he had been singularly reserved and reticent. Upon *that* subject, indeed, he was resolute not to speak at all, and perhaps was secretly repentant of having said so much. His manner, though always respectful, was no longer effusive; it seemed to say: "Whatever obligations I may have once been under, Signor Litton, to our common friend, it has now been repaid to you by the risk I have incurred." Walter, taking into consideration the natural timidity of the man, appreciated the sacrifice that had evidently been made of his peace of mind, but thought the risk ridiculously exaggerated. To an Englishman and a Londoner, like himself, it was hard to believe that the apprehensions of this Sicilian were founded on sober fact. That brigandage existed in the neighbourhood must probably be the case, since every one acknowledged it; the natives even spoke of it with a certain bated breath, and with a tempered indignation which shewed that they stood in personal fear. But he had begun to assume that such outrages were no more common than the eruptions of Etna or

Vesuvius. He had heard of none taking place, but only legends of their occurrence last year at latest. He himself had occasionally been beyond the confines of the city, without meeting with annoyance ; and had climbed a hill or two, without coming on any one more lawless or ferocious-looking than a shepherd in sheepskin. Other visitors, better worth kidnapping than a penniless artist like himself, had been equally enterprising—for a certain sense of danger had, he was compelled to confess, been experienced in these expeditions—and had likewise returned to their hotels without molestation.

A fortnight had passed away since his host's warning, and he began to congratulate himself that he had not unnecessarily alarmed the merchant and his family, by communicating it to them in any way, when a circumstance occurred which seemed to put their safety beyond all question. On going to the window one morning to take his usual feast of sky, and sea, and mountain before sitting down to breakfast, the light spars of the *Sylphide* had vanished from their usual position.

"Yes, signor," said the voice of Baccari, as Walter stood staring at the vacant place, while a certain void that seemed to answer to it made itself felt in his quick-beating heart, "I am glad to say your friends are saved, and not at my expense ; they have saved themselves—which is always the best way of doing it—by leaving Palermo."

"Do you mean to say that the yacht has sailed ?"

"Thanks to the Virgin, yes—for Messina. You don't know what I have suffered for the sake of Milord Brown, or you would, I hope, look better pleased. Ah, I breathe again. I feel as when I first came on shore after little Francisco fell overboard. You will not catch me meddling with the affairs of other people again, I promise you."

"It does not appear to me that any evil has happened to you—or, indeed, to anybody else—from your communication," remarked Walter dryly.

"Happened ? No ; but it might have happened. Ah, signor, if we could only see the dangers we have escaped, we should have more thankful hearts ! Even now, I dare not tell you all. Let it suffice—still between ourselves—that Milord Brown has been dogged day and night ; they have been so hungry after him, that I almost wonder they did not pounce upon him on

the Marina. Half Palermo has been in Captain Corrali's pay for the last fortnight. They would have seized him at the very shrine of Santa Rosalia, if he had but ventured up Pellegrino. But as it is, he has disappointed everybody—that is, I mean, all the wicked people. Milord is not only very rich, but very wise ; he has taken himself off by sea to Messina. Look ! yonder is his fine ship ! ”

And truly at that moment the white sails of the English yacht, set to catch every breath of the light Mediterranean breeze, could be seen rounding the harbour point.

“ And have all his family gone with him ? ” inquired Walter, by no means in the tone of triumph with which his companion spoke. A sickening feeling of desertion, of loneliness, as well as hopelessness, had taken possession of him. His labour had been in vain ; he had crossed the seas without being of any service to Lilian, nor had she even been aware of his faithful presence. He required no acknowledgment of his devotion, yet that what he had done should not be known—might never be known—to its object, seemed a hard fate.

“ No, signor, not all the family ; his son-in-law and married daughter are still at the hotel, intending, I believe, to follow Milord to-morrow by the steamer. But what does *that* signify to Corrali—even if he caught him, since the big fish has got through the meshes—since he has lost Milord ! ”

This reference to Captain Corrali's disappointment was thrown away upon Walter ; his mind had dissevered itself from all his Sicilian surroundings, and was busy with Lilian only and her affairs. Since she and her father had sailed alone, it was clear that their relations with the captain had not grown more cordial ; but could she be happier on that account, when she must needs picture to herself poor Lotty bearing the brunt of Sir Reginald's ill-temper, increased by the sense of his having thus mismanaged matters ! It was a satisfaction, of course, to reflect that the worthy merchant had escaped all danger from the brigands, but now that he had done so, that danger appeared even less to Walter than before. He even confessed to himself that he would have preferred Mr. Brown to run what little risk there might have been by remaining at Palermo. As for him (Walter), there he must stay, his solitude made more irksome than before by Lilian's flying visit, for it was impossible that he

could follow her to Messina by the steamer which was to convey Sir Reginald and his wife ; and of public conveyances by land—thanks to the fear of Captain Corrali & Co.—there were none.

For weeks, Walter's art had been in abeyance ; the pre-occupation of his mind, in spite of the novelty and splendour of the scenes that presented themselves to his gaze, had kept it so ; and now it seemed utterly impossible that he could take up either brush or pencil. He envied the Sicilian nature which permitted those about him to find happiness in listless ease, to loll in the sunshine, to dream away an aimless existence. It was not the climate that enervated him, and made him disinclined even for the labour which had once been his delight, but sheer despondency ; hope, the lamp of life, that shines with so bright a flame in youth, with so feeble a flicker in old age, was burning low within him ; and in that land of light and colour all seemed dark. All day he sat unoccupied at the window, from which he had watched the *Sylphide* slowly glide to eastward, gazing on the burning empty street, on the gay Marina, with its glittering throng of carriages, and then on the calm evening sea.

"Why, the signor has never touched his dinner !" expostulated Baccari, coming in to see his lodger, as his custom was upon his return from his favourite café.

"I was not hungry," answered Walter quietly.

"How unfortunate, upon the very day when there was so fine a fish ! Francisco caught it himself this morning."

"Is your son within doors ?"

"Yes, indeed ; he fancies he has earned a holiday because of that mere stroke of good luck ; and has been doing nothing—positively nothing—throughout the day." The good man, who never stirred a finger in the way of work himself, beyond bringing in Walter's meals, denounced this idleness with amazing energy.

"Send the lad to me," said Walter ; and accordingly Francisco presented himself, rubbing his fine almond eyes, and looking listless and languid from head to heel.

"Could we go for a sail, my boy ?" inquired Walter wistfully.

"We can go on the water, if the signor wishes it," replied

the other, with a glance at the glassy sea ; " but there is not a breath of wind."

" Has there been no wind all day ?"

" None since the morning ; Milord's yat " (he had learned a little English, and was very proud of that word, and his pronunciation of it) " had a little with her, but it soon came to nothing."

" The *Sylphide* has not got far, you think, then ?"

" Not ten miles away, if so much."

" Could we overtake her ?" exclaimed Walter suddenly.

" Well, that depends ; there is a little breeze from the shore, though none out yonder ; and by hugging the land, it would be possible for so small a boat as ours to make some way, perhaps."

" But we could use the oars."

Francisco shook his head. " The signor would find that very toilsome," he answered ; the idea of taking an oar himself not even so much as occurring to his imagination.

" At all events, let us go," said Walter. The poor young fellow was seized with an uncontrollable desire to have a last farewell look—not at Lilian, for that would be impossible, but—at the yacht that was bearing her away from him. In twenty minutes, the two were on board their boat. It was a tiny craft, that would have succumbed to a Levanter—or even half a one—in five minutes, but its lightness was now of advantage to them. The gentle breath that sighed from the great island-garden, swelled its small sail, though, as Francisco had prognosticated, it failed them when even a little way from land. They therefore coasted along the shore, following its myriad indentations, and coming face to face with a thousand unexpected beauties, which, under any other circumstances, would have ravished the young painter's eye. Presently the moon arose, and touched all these objects with an unearthly splendour.

" It is late," observed Francisco sententiously.

" Where ?" asked Walter eagerly.

" I said it was late, signor."

" I thought you said : ' There is the yacht.'"

" No ; she may have got half-way to Messina by this time. The wind may have held with her, though it dropped with us ; and let me tell you, it will be harder work getting home than coming."

"Let us round the next headland, and if nothing is to be seen of her, then we will put back."

Francisco, at the tiller, raises his shoulders half an inch, his eyebrows a whole one, and lights another cigarette. This Englishman, who seems to be in love with a "yat," is incomprehensible to him, but he is generous, and deserves to be humoured. As they round the promontory he has indicated, an immense reach of sea comes into view, but not a sail is to be seen upon it.

"The 'yat' must be five-and-twenty miles to eastward of us, signor, if she——"

"There she is!" interrupted Walter eagerly. His quick eyes had detected her to the right of them, almost close in shore.

"What can this mean?" muttered Francisco, a gleam of interest crossing his dark features. "There must be something wrong here."

"Wrong? Why so? She looks safe enough."

"Ships do not ride at anchor with all their sails set, signor. See! she is drifting this way and that; she has no steersman!"

"The man must have gone to sleep; let us make haste to warn them," cried Walter, nervously seizing the light oars.

A few minutes brought the boat within hailing distance of the *Sylphide*, for such she undoubtedly was. Not a soul was to be seen upon her deck, but a light was gleaming in the stern-cabin. Though she carried a crowd of canvas—every stitch she had, indeed, was set—her progress was very slow; but what there was of it was erratic: she seemed like a ship in a dream.

"In ten minutes she would have been on shore," observed Francisco.

"But in such a night as this, there could have been no danger?" urged Walter, alarmed even at the supposititious peril from which their opportune arrival was about to preserve his Lillian.

"Perhaps not," said Francisco sententiously, steering straight for the vessel. As they neared her, he stood up and scrutinised her narrowly from stem to stern. The unaccustomed excitement in his face aroused in Walter an indefinite anxiety.

"What is it that you fear, Francisco? Nothing can surely have happened to the crew—to the passengers?"

"I know not what to think, signor. Shall we go on board!"

Walter hesitated : the occasion was certainly sufficiently momentous to excuse such a step ; but he shrank from thrusting his presence on those to whom it would be so utterly unexpected, so unexplainable, and—in the case of Mr. Brown, at all events—so unwelcome.

“Let us row round her first,” said he ; and they did so. Not a sound was heard save the dip of their own oars : not a living being was to be seen. The *Sylphide's* boat was fastened at her stern, so it was plain that the crew could not have left the vessel by that means. They pushed between it and the yacht, so that Walter, as he stood up, could look right into the window of the stern-cabin. A lighted lamp swung from the roof of it, and made all things visible within it, but it had no tenant. From no other window or port-hole was there sight or sound of life : the exterior of the hull above the water-line exhibited no trace of damage ; no appearance of any collision with ship or rock made itself apparent anywhere.

The yacht was empty.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TO THE RESCUE.

NO longer discomposed by any apprehensions of the nature of his reception, since it was clear the vessel was tenantless, Walter yet hesitated to set foot on her deck. Some spectacle—he knew not what—might be awaiting him in that silent ship, which it was better for him to die than see. He had read, in history or romance, of Saltee rovers—pirates of the Mediterranean—and the wild fancy struck him, and chilled his blood, that some catastrophe might have happened to—to those on board (he did not dare say, even to himself, to Lilian), such as had been common half a century ago, though even then not close to the shores of Sicily. The idea was monstrous; but the fact before them—a ship in full sail, but empty, with her boat towing at her stern—was monstrous too, and not to be explained on reasonable grounds. While he still stood sick at heart, half resolved, half disinclined to know the worst, Francisco settled the matter for him. “She will be ashore in five minutes, signor,” he cried, “if we do not drop her anchor.” And with that, he sprang on board, and Walter followed, to assist him. The lad’s gestures were eloquence itself, and, besides, by this time Walter had acquired some considerable knowledge of the island tongue.

Having succeeded in bringing the yacht to a stand-still, the two young men proceeded to make a thorough investigation of her. The deck was clean, and the coils of rope were in their proper places, shewing no signs of any struggle. The brass-bound steps that led to the little saloon, and the brass rails beside them, shone bright in the pale moonlight, and bespoke the latest and most scrupulous care. On the table were the remains of a luxurious dessert, with wine and glasses—one of the latter of which was broken. A knife was lying besides the fragments of it on the floor. Of the three chairs that had been so lately occupied, one was also overturned.

Besides these, there were no traces of disorder. The door, however, at the extremity of this apartment shewed traces of having been battered in. It opened into the stern-cabin which they had already examined through the window, and which had evidently been used as the ladies' boudoir. An harmonium stood open with a music-book upon it; and on a sewing-machine was a small phial containing oil, and standing in an upright position. Here, then, Lilian had sat, and worked, and played but, at most, a few hours ago, and until the moment when some mysterious fate befell herself and all the other occupants of the little vessel. The broken panels of the door were an indisputable proof of violence, but from whose hands? was a question as unanswerable as ever. On board an English yacht upon a pleasure-cruise, the idea of mutiny was not to be entertained for a moment; moreover, the ship's boat would have been used by the mutineers to get to land. The attack, then, if attack there had been, must needs have come from without. Judging from what they saw, the resistance must have been small, which, considering that the crew consisted of four British sailors beside the captain, was unlikely to have been the case, unless the thing had been effected by surprise. No other cabin shewed any signs of hurry of departure on the part of its inmates; but in Lilian's own little bower—Walter entered it with a sensation of sacrilege—the door of a species of wardrobe stood wide open, as though some article—probably a shawl or cloak, of which there were several on its shelves—had been snatched from it in haste. Save the above indications, all below-stairs was just as it might have been in Palermo harbour. Upon deck, however, a second examination revealed some blood-stains close to the tiller, which marked the place, perhaps, where the steersman had been struck down by some unseen or unexpected foe.

"Great Heaven! there has been murder done!" murmured Walter hoarsely. Was it possible that the butchery had been wholesale, and that the bodies of the victims had been cast into the sea? His knees trembled, and a sharp spasm shot across his heart at this frightful thought, which was, however, dismissed almost as soon as entertained. Strong men fighting for their lives, even though unarmed and taken by surprise, would have left more evidences of their cruel fate than this.

Indeed, save for that one bloody token, it was difficult to believe that any act of violence could have been committed, so neat and orderly was the ship, so peaceful the fair scene in which it lay. The dark-blue sea was without a ripple, save where the broad silver pathway of the moon made inequalities on its surface visible ; the shore, close to which they were, was fringed with orchards, and the mountain sides beyond were richly cultivated.

"Francisco," exclaimed Walter, "for Heaven's sake, speak a word to me, or I shall go mad ! What has happened ? What can have happened ? This is your own land—not mine. I feel like one in a hideous dream, where all is unreal and monstrous. Have you any explanation of this frightful thing to offer ? Have you any hope to give me ; if not, at least tell me your fears."

Francisco looked furtively towards the shore, and laid a finger on his lips. "Yes, signor, I think I know what has happened," answered he in his soft musical tones. "Come down here into the cabin ; there is no knowing who may be watching us up here, or whose sharp ears may be listening."

"Well, well, what is it ?" inquired Walter impatiently, when they had descended the stairs. "You would never look like that, if my friends had been murdered, surely."

"O no, signor ; there has been no murder," answered Francisco quietly—"that is, unless there was some absolute necessity for it. Milord and the signora in any case are safe ; I will stake my life on that. Look you, the 'yat' was becalmed and close in shore ; and these gentlemen of the mountains——"

"What ! the brigands ?"

"Hush ! Yes ; they doubtless came out in boats, and captured her by surprise."

"But who ever heard of brigands turning pirates ?"

"No one, signor, up to this moment ; but the circumstances, you must allow, were very uncommon. Milord's departure was a most serious disappointment for them. They took it—it is no wonder—much to heart, and clung to hope to the last. They had scouts all along the shore, or, perhaps, they watched the vessel from their own woods up yonder, and descended when the opportunity offered. I don't know that it was so,

but to me, who am acquainted with the captain, it seems probable."

"The captain! What captain?"

"Corralli."

"Great Heaven! Do you think, then, that my countrymen have become his captives?"

Head, eyes, and fingers all combined in giving a most unmistakable "I do."

"But the signora?"

"She is doubtless in his hands, but only for the present. He will send her back, since the troops will be called out, and she would impede his flight. But he will keep milord."

"They will not injure the young lady in any way?" asked Walter imploringly, as though it had been in Francisco's power to prevent them.

"Certainly not. There are women in the band: the captain's sister, Joanna, is always with him, and has power; the signora will doubtless be placed under her protection."

Walter shuddered. How horrible was the idea of Lilian needing such a chaperon! How horrible, and how incongruous! Could he be really talking about the same girl whom he had seen surrounded with the conventional attributes of wealth in London; serene and quiet, in her garden at Willowbank; gracious at her father's table; and whom he had last met among that commonplace crowd in the garden of Regent's Park! And now it was more than probable that she was held captive by a lawless bandit among yonder hills! The very means by which he had become acquainted with the fact—the little Sicilian dictionary he held in his hand, and without which, half of Francisco's communication would have been lost upon him—was an element in this incongruity, and helped to give a grotesqueness, which, however, was very far from being laughable, to this mysterious drama.

Walter had listened to his companion's words with enforced attention, but now that the information had been obtained—now that he had something to go upon—he became all impatience for action. Every moment in which he was not engaged in promoting Lilian's release seemed a waste of time, and a reproach to his loving heart. "Our best plan, I conclude,"

said he hastily, "is at once to return to Palermo, and give notice of what has occurred to the police."

"To the police? O no, signor."

"To the soldiers, then?"

"Nay; that would be worse still. Your best hope to see milord again is to communicate with —his banker."

Walter was astounded; it seemed to him that Francisco was humouring British prejudices, in making a commercial transaction out of this abominable outrage.

"Indeed, signor," continued the other quietly, "that is your best chance. If you can get the ransom before the government stirs in the matter, your friends may be released at once; but, otherwise, the transaction will be forbidden; the soldiers will be sent out, and there will be danger. Not to the signora," he added hastily, perceiving Walter to change colour. "I cannot but think that she will be sent home in safety. But, to her father—— If Corrali is now disappointed of a plot he has so long calculated upon, he will be capable—it is idle to deny it—of any atrocity."

"But how shall I know what is the sum demanded?"

"There is no fear upon that point," answered Francisco, smiling. "To-morrow, or the next day—so soon as he considers himself in safety, Corrali will send in his terms."

"But, in the meanwhile, we are losing precious time," broke in Walter impatiently. "If we were in Palermo now, for example, a pursuit might be organized, and these brigands forced to give up their prey."

"It would be the height of imprudence, even then, signor," replied Francisco confidently; "but we are not in Palermo, nor could we sail there in this calm under six hours at quickest."

"But we could go by land in half that time."

"The signor can go, if he wishes it," was the stolid reply. "For myself, I have seen Captain Corrali face to face already; I do not desire another interview. It is true he may be in the mountains by this time; but his people are everywhere, and on the road to Palermo to-night, above all places—you may be sure of it—to intercept this very news."

A look of contempt came into Walter's face, but instantly died away. This lad had good reason to shun the brigands, whether his fears on this occasion were well grounded or not.

He was not in love with Lilian, nor interested in saving the money of Mr. Christopher Brown. It was unreasonable, therefore, to despise him—who, moreover, had a father who loved him as the apple of his eye—for refusing to risk life and liberty on such an errand.

"Francisco," said Walter gently, "take you the boat at once back to Palermo, and give information of what has occurred, if I have not already done so. Should you not find me at home, go straight to Sir Reginald Selwyn, at the *Hôtel de France*, and tell him what has happened. And now, put me ashore."

Unmistakable compassion looked softly out of Francisco's eyes. "The way is long," he said—"twelve miles at the very least; and it is doubtful whether at any village the signor will find a conveyance."

"No matter; I can run the distance in three hours. The road goes by the coast, does it not, and cannot be mistaken?"

"The road is straight enough, but—— Is the signor quite determined?"

They had reached the deck by this time, and Walter's only answer was to step into the boat which was fastened alongside the yacht. The muffled dip of the oars alone broke the silence of sea and shore; the hills, the woods, seemed steeped in slumber; through the orchard trees the white road could be seen empty and silent.

"Keep in the centre," whispered Francisco, pointing towards it, "and do not stop for a shot or two. They do not shoot well, flying, these gentlemen. But if they once capture you, make no attempt to escape, or they will kill you to a certainty—that is a point of honour with them."

Here the boat touched land, and Walter leaped lightly upon the shore.

"Good-bye, Francisco, till to-morrow morning," said he cheerfully. "I shall beat you by three hours, for a ducat."

"Good-bye, signor; and may the blessed saints protect you from all harm!"

The next moment, the boat had shot into the bay, and Walter was pushing his way through the little orchard that lay between the sea and the high-road.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE ROAD.

RAPID motion of any sort is detrimental to human thought, and especially that of one's own legs. As Walter's feet beat quickly on the hard road, something seemed also to beat within his brain; the ideas in it were jostled together, and if one of them got uppermost for a brief space, it was soon usurped by another. At first, fear was dominant—fear, not upon his own account at all; when a man is hopeless, he feels no fear. If Lilian had ever been within his reach, or even if she had promised herself to him in the case, however improbable, of her father giving consent to their union, life would have been inexpressibly dear to Walter, and he would have shrunk from losing it. As it was, Captain Corrali, or any other gentleman of his calling, was welcome to it, or seemed to be so. So far as he was personally concerned, it was a pleasure to be thus risking it for her sweet sake; it was but a poor thing, and scarcely to be counted as a sacrifice; but it might be valuable just now to *her*, and therefore it behoved him to preserve it. He looked, therefore, sharply to right and left, and kept the middle of the road, as Francisco had advised him to do.

On the left was always rising ground, which by degrees reached mountain height, with its summit but rarely visible; on the right, were sometimes orchards, or cultivated plots of ground, and sometimes only the sea-beach. There was no sign of life on any hand. There is nothing so wearisome as indolence, and hence the Sicilian retires early; still, the evidence of man's labour convinced him that he could not be very far from some village, or at least a human habitation. When one is running, one's aspirations are limited, and to find an inn with a horse in its stable was the summit of Walter's ambition for the present; that would enable him the more quickly to reach Selwyn, whom for the last fortnight it had been his con-

stant endeavour to avoid. Everything in the world is by comparison—which accounts perhaps, for so much of it being odious—and what had been his bane, he now longed for. The embarrassment, the humiliation, which such a meeting would cost him, the imputations which it would necessarily lay him under—all these had sunk out of sight, and left Lilian's deliverance alone visible. He was not much moved by Francisco's arguments against employing force in the matter; the lad had doubtless inherited some timidity from his father, and his own captivity by the brigands, when he was but a boy, had given him, probably, an undue impression of their courage and tenacity of purpose. He thought that if the Government would only send out troops enough, the scoundrels must soon be surrounded, and compelled to deliver up their prisoners. In the mean time, it was their interest to treat them well; and, thank Heaven, the night was warm and dry, and Lilian, delicate though she was, might take no harm from her temporary captivity. It was impossible, at the rate he was going—though he took care not to press the pace too much, since it might be necessary at any moment to "put on a spurt"—to look below the surface of things; moreover, it was above all things essential to keep a sharp eye on the road. Though using as much caution as he could, his footsteps rang out in the silence, and must needs give notice of his approach to any one on the watch. Presently, he heard another sound from the hilly ground which was in that part covered with scrub—low trees with a thick undergrowth; a sharp hissing or kissing noise. He stopped a moment to listen, and it was repeated farther on, and therefore less clearly. It might very well proceed from some bird, or even insect, with the nature of which he was unacquainted; yet it startled him, and he mechanically increased his speed, keeping more to the orchard side of the road. In this he erred, for at that moment a man clothed in sheepskin, and with a gun in his hand, sprang out from it, exclaiming something, which was probably an equivalent for the old British "Stand, sir!"

Walter had been an idle man at college, but he had learned something from an outside professor, who taught Self-defence, and especially the useful art of hitting out quickly from the shoulder. No sooner had this wolf in sheep's clothing thus addressed him, than seizing the barrel of the gun with one

hand, he knocked him down with the other. At the same moment, the low wall on the other side of the road became a parapet for gun-barrels—one, two, three, four; he could count them, as they shone dull and cold in the moon-light; and again the warning cry, "Stand, sir!" rang out, as it seemed, from half-a-dozen mouths. Walter's reply was to bound forward like an antelope. "They do not shoot well, flying, these gentlemen," were the words that rang in his ears, with a storm of bullets. One of them stung his cheek, and he could feel the hot blood running down it; but it only acted like a spur. Never, even when he carried off "the Pewter" in the university flat-race, two years (it seemed two centuries) ago, had he ever laid foot to ground so nimbly. Perhaps the guns came from Birmingham, but, in any case, they were not breech-loaders, nor doubled-barrelled; they had advanced all the leaden arguments they had to urge, and he had got clean away for that time, at all events; only, what troubled him was, that that soft sibilant noise—even at that supreme moment it struck him how like it was to kissing—was repeated, and repeated again, far, far in front of him, as though the whole hillside had been tenanted by ardent lovers. He guessed rightly—though the fact was not revealed to him just then—that it was the system of telegraphy used by the brigands.

This attempt to intercept him had been made within a few hundred yards of a large village, which a turn of the road now revealed to him. The houses were of tolerable size, and mostly built of stone; and since in every case the shutters were closed, and the absence of glass in the windows was not observable, the place looked as well to do as any petty provincial town in England. Walter took it as a matter of course that herein he would find succour and sympathy, even if he should be unable to procure a vehicle to carry him the remainder of his journey. But either the inhabitants were unanimous in their habits of early retirement, or what, after a few applications with his fist at a door or two, he began to think the likelier, the noise of the brigands' guns, had induced them to shrink into their shells and simulate slumber. Not a single reply did he extract in answer to his repeated summons, until he reached the principal inn, where, in an up-stairs window, a light was still burning. Here the master of the establishment was so good as to come

out to him in person, appearing in a large white cap, in which he might either have been cooking or sleeping, and but little else in the way of garments. There was no meat in the house, he observed, with great volubility, and without giving Walter time to name his wants; nothing, indeed, to eat but macaroni. If the signor did not require food, so much the better; but seeing him to be an Englishman, his mind had naturally flown to meat.

"Have you no eyes?" interrupted Walter impatiently. "Can you not see that my cheek is bleeding? I have just been waylaid by brigands."

"Heavens! Is it possible? Brigands?"

"It is quite possible, as one would have thought you could believe, since it happened just outside your town. However, I want nothing from you but the means of getting away from it. I must have a carriage of some kind, in which to get to Palermo. These scoundrels have captured an English lady and her father, and every moment is precious. Just give me a basin and some water, while the horses are being harnessed."

Walter would not even enter the house, but stood at the door while he washed his wound, which turned out to be little more than a scratch.

"Now, when is that carriage coming round?"

He had seen one in the yard that adjoined the inn.

"You are welcome to the carriage, signor; but, alas! we have no horses, nor do I believe that there is one in the place. Two gentlemen have just stopped here with a tired pair from Termini, which we were unable to replace."

"From Termini? Why, that is the way I have come! Did they not meet any molestation?"

"No, indeed, signor," answered the innkeeper with a smile of incredulity, that seemed to say: "Young gentlemen get scratches from other things beside musket-balls. "They certainly did not mention that they had been shot at."

"Well, I have been shot at," observed Walter, with irritation; "and I must get on to Palermo—those two things are certain."

That his host was indisposed to offer him any assistance, and anxious to get rid of him, there was no doubt; and what Baccari had told him of the fear inspired in the villages by the brigands, convinced Walter of the reason.

"You do not seem very hospitable, my friend," said he severely; "and I shall make it my business, when I reach my journey's end, to let the police know how you have treated me. Where there is a carriage for hire, there are mostly horses——"

"There are none here," interrupted the landlord sullenly; "but if the signor can make good use of his legs, he cannot fail to catch the vehicle of which I have spoken, since the road is hilly, and it can scarcely move out of a foot-pace."

The suggestion was not inviting; but as there seemed no alternative, Walter turned upon his heel, with an exclamation, which, being in pure Saxon, let us hope the innkeeper imagined to be a farewell blessing, and recommenced his journey. He had recovered his breath, and felt altogether "like running." If any Sicilian eyes were watching him through the closed shutters, as he moved lightly up the street, they would have seen what was probably a rarity to them—an English athlete in "good form." For boxing, though he could, as we have seen, give a well delivered blow enough, Walter's frame was too slightly made; but for speed and endurance, few amateurs could touch him. He ran "clean" without that "loppet" motion from which even professional runners are seldom free; and he knew how to husband his resources, while appearing to be putting forth his utmost powers. If the village landlord had told him the truth—a very improbable "if," it must be confessed, in any case, and, moreover, his words had had to Walter's ear a tone not only of sarcasm, but of malignity—he had little doubt of getting a lift on his way—of overtaking this carriage with two tired horses upon a hilly road; and even if there was no carriage, he was game to keep up his present pace to the gates of Palermo. The road, though it turned inland, was now much more open; he could see not only around him but before him, and presently he beheld, just disappearing at the top of a steep hill, some slow-moving vehicle. What description of conveyance it was, he had not time to make out; but the sight of it gave wings to his feet. Even if it was but a laden cart, he might bribe the driver to let him take the horse out of it, and thereby reach the city half an hour earlier. At the top of the hill, a most splendid spectacle awaited him: the whole Bay of Palermo, even to Cape di Gallo, lay stretched beneath his gaze; the full height of Mount Pelegrino stood up black, except where the moonlight

crowned it with silver ; while before him was a defile winding between woods of spruce fir, through which, crossed by a stone bridge, leaped down white water to the sea. What delighted him most, however, was the sight of a wagonette and pair, with two men in it, which had just passed the bridge, and was making its way up the opposite hill. As he ran down towards it at the top of his speed, he fancied he heard once again the sibilant kissing noise run, like some light substance that rapidly catches fire, along the firs upon the left hand ; but it might well have been the noise in his ears produced by his rapid progress ; and, at all events, with help so near, there was no occasion for giving attention to it. The occupants of the carriage seemed to have heard it too, for, to his great joy, he saw it stop, and one man stood up in it, as if to look behind. Walter had no breath to waste in calling, but he drew out his white handkerchief as he ran on, to attract attention ; and in this it seemed he had succeeded, for he saw the man making gestures to him ; and in a few minutes more, he found himself panting and exhausted by the door of the wagonette.

Two Sicilians, not of the upper ranks, as it seemed to him, though they were somewhat profusely decorated with chains and jewellery, were its occupants, and he who had been standing up addressed him in courteous tones.

"Do you want a lift, signor ?" inquired he.

"Indeed, I do," said Walter, not waiting for a more formal invitation, but at once climbing up into the nearest seat. "I am pursued and in trouble. Pray, tell your coachman to drive on, and I will tell you all as we go along."

At a word from the man who had addressed him, the driver touched the horses with his whip, and off they went, though at a rate so slow, that a London cabman taken by the hour would have been ashamed of it.

While Walter was recovering his breath, he took an observation of his companions. The general impression which his first hurried glance had given him of their "dressy" appearance was more than confirmed ; if they had been Londoners, he would have set them down as belonging to the swell mob, or, rather, they were more like the representatives of that class in farces. They wore billy-cock hats, rather taller in the crown than those commonly seen in England ; shooting-jackets of a burnt sienna

colour—so it seemed by the moonlight—with enormous pockets both inside and out, such as poachers and gamekeepers use. So far, their dress was “quiet” enough; but their waistcoats, which were of blue cloth, were covered with gilt buttons, sewn on like those of pages, not for use, but show, and positively festooned with gold (or gilt) chains. To the shooting-jackets were attached a sort of hood, to throw over the head in case of rain; and round each man’s waist was a broad belt, with a shot or cartridge pouch depending from it. Under the seat opposite to Walter was a long gun, and he conjectured rightly that its fellow lay beneath him. Upon the whole, he came to the conclusion that these men were small tradespeople, who had gone out for a holiday in which sport—or what they thought to be so—had formed a principal feature. They had probably been shooting tomtits.

“If you could get your coachman to drive a little quicker,” said Walter, “I should feel more comfortable while telling you my story; first, because it is of the utmost importance to me to get to Palermo as soon as possible; secondly, because, as I believe, we are upon dangerous ground.”

“Dangerous ground!” laughed he who seemed to take the lead as a superior mind. “When did that come into your head, Signor Inglese?”

“I am perfectly serious, gentlemen,” said Walter gravely; “and not only did the circumstance happen which I have described, but a whole band of these rascals have boarded an English gentleman’s boat in the bay over yonder, and carried both himself and his daughter into captivity. My object is to give the alarm as soon as possible, that measures may be taken for their release.”

“Naturally,” answered he who sat on the same seat with Walter, “if the Englishman is a person of consequence, they will probably send the troops after him immediately.”

“Just so: that is the plan I hope will be adopted. But, in the meantime, I repeat, I wish we could move a little faster. I would gladly bear the whole expense of the wagonette, if I might be allowed to have my way in this particular.”

“That is impossible, Signor Inglese,” answered the other with a courteous inclination of his head. “We are proud to be able to do you this small service. And as for brigands, there are none so near Palermo as this—I do assure you.”

"And yet I could almost swear I heard them signalling to one another not five minutes ago, down there," argued Walter, pointing towards the bridge. "It was a cry like this;" and he proceeded to imitate it, not, it must be confessed, with great success. The attempt, however, excited the boisterous mirth of his companions.

"The signor must have heard the nightingales," said one.

"Or the echo of his last parting from his mistress must have been still ringing in his ears," observed the other. "As for the brigands, what have we to fear, who carry guns. Would the signor like to take one for himself?" and he motioned to that which lay under the opposite seat.

Nothing loath to be armed in case of the worst, Walter stooped down to pick up the gun, when a heavy weight fell violently upon his shoulders, and he found himself face foremost upon the floor of the vehicle. He struggled violently to free himself; but the space was too confined for him to throw off the man who had leaped upon him; and in less than a minute, his confederate had attached a rope to his outstretched wrists, and fastened them firmly behind his back. When he was suffered to rise, the carriage had stopped, and the steps were already let down behind.

"Scende," said one of his captors sententiously.

"Coachman," cried Walter, "you will bear witness what these men have done, and where they did it; they are brigands ——"

Here something cold touched the tip of Walter's ear: it was the muzzle of a pistol. "If the signor speaks again, he dies," said the voice that had addressed him so often. It was still quiet, and even courteous, but very firm.

Walter called to mind Francisco's advice about submission, should he fall into brigands' hands, and was silent. It was not likely where deeds were impossible, that words should avail him. The driver, too, it was now plain, was either in league with these men, or was afraid to oppose their wishes in any respect; he had never once turned round, so as to shew his face, and now he drove away, leaving his three fares in the road, with the same precaution. Walter had seen no more of him from first to last than Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., saw of the fat traveller. Ere the noise of the departing vehicle had died

away, one of his late companions put his thumb and forefinger to his lips, and, whistling shrilly, produced the identical sound which had that night so often created his suspicions. It was at once replied to from the adjoining spruce woods, in half-a-dozen places, and as many men sprang out, each with a gun in his hand, and approached Walter and his captors.

"Your name?" inquired the man who had taken the lead in the wagonette, while the others stood round in an attitude of respectful attention.

"My name is Walter Litton; my profession, that of a painter; I am an English subject. To what money I have about me, you are welcome; and I swear that I will never give evidence against you, if you will only let me go free. Otherwise, this outrage will not pass unpunished."

"The young cock crows loudly," observed the other, laughing.

"Well, signor, you have told me your name, and now I will tell you mine. If you have heard it before, it will teach you what to expect, and how idle are all these ridiculous menaces. If you have not heard it, you will soon come to know me—I am *Il Capitano Corralli*."

CHAPTER XXXI.

OUTDOOR LODGINGS.

WALTER LITTON had great courage ; but a cold chill swept for an instant across his heart when he heard into whose power he had fallen. A hundred stories of the cruelty of the brigand chief, which he had heard while in Palermo, not only from Baccari, but many others—for among the poorer class this man's crimes were the favourite topic of talk—and which he had disbelieved and laughed at, now returned to him with terrible force. There was a house in the town where the chin and gray beard of an old man were shewn, which Corrali had sent in to his family as a token that he would "not be trifled with," which was his phrase when a victim either could not or would not pay the price that had been fixed upon as his ransom. Up to this moment, Walter had discredited that ghastly trophy—which was on exhibition for money—but he did not feel so sceptical now. A rich man was comparatively safe from death and torture ; it was the poor whom Corrali persisted in believing rich, who suffered, and Walter himself was poor. Those upon whose account he had fallen into this trap, were sure to be released (as he concluded), as soon as the extent of their captor's demands was known ; but for him, there was no such surety. All the money—at all events, all the available money—he had in the world was some seventy or eighty pounds, which was in his lodgings at Palermo. He had no credit at any banker's, nor was he known to a single influential person. The precautions he had taken to conceal himself were like to bear bitter fruit indeed. It was only too probable that he would be butchered up in yonder mountains, without so much as a single fellow-countryman being aware of his sad fate. Even if Sir Reginald—the only man who could at present help him—were informed of his danger, it was doubtful if he would stir in the matter ; doubtful even whether he would ever let Lilian know that, for

her sake, he had suffered captivity and death. Once again Walter gazed—but with what infinitely greater interest than before—upon his late companion in the wagonette, upon his present master, and disposer of his life and fortunes. He was a man of middle size, and quite young, perhaps thirty at the most ; fair for a Sicilian, and by no means ill-looking : he had blue eyes, not soft, as eyes of that colour mostly are, but stern and steel-like ; he had a long and curling beard, which he was now stroking irresolutely with his dirty but bejewelled hand.

"Your wrists will be unbound, Signor Inglese," said he, in courteous tones, "because we have to make a rapid march, but you will be none the more free on that account. On the first symptom of an attempt to escape, or to speak with any whom we may chance to meet, you will be shot through the head. I never speak twice upon this point, so lay my words to heart. You can run, I know, but not so fast as a bullet flies.—Santoro, Colletta !" At these words, two of the tallest of the band came forward, "You have heard what I say, and are answerable for this gentleman's safety." The two men ranged themselves, one upon each side of Walter, and at the same time the rope was cut that bound his wrists. Then Corrali pointed to the mountain before them, and said "Forward !"

Bonds to the free man are what dependence is to the noble mind ; other outrages—a blow or an insult—rouse indignation, audacity ; but not these : they render their victim apathetic, hopeless. No sooner did Walter find himself master of his own wrists, than he felt another man again—himself ; and therefore he at once began to think of others. Perhaps he was going to be taken to Lillian—to share her captivity ; it might be even, to shew himself of use to her, notwithstanding his apparent forlorn condition. This put new blood in his veins. A broad ditch intervened between the copse into which they were about to enter and the road ; the brigands began to scramble through it ; but Walter took it in a bound, then, fortunately for himself, halted on the other side. A couple of sharp clicks informed him that his guard had cocked their guns.

"Do not waste your energies, young man," exclaimed Corrali in a cynical tone ; "you will require all your strength before you reach home to-night."

At the time, Walter did not attach much meaning to these words ; the ease with which he had out-stripped his pursuers, after leaving the boat, and the inability of his present companions to leap the ditch, gave him no very high idea of brigand agility ; but what they wanted in spring and swiftness, he soon found out was more than compensated for by their powers of endurance. Their rate of progress, though not very rapid, had something of " that long gallop, which can tire the hound's deep hate, and hunter's fire," which is the attribute of the wolf ; they never halted, nor seemed to require rest or breath. On and on they pushed, through woods, through fields, and presently up the sides of the mountain ; and though they often looked behind them and about them, it was without any abatement of their speed. Walter was, to begin with, at a great disadvantage as to physical exertion, since he had had no sleep, whereas the brigands rest in the day, and only move, unless closely pursued, at night-time. He was too proud, however, especially after what the captain had said, to own himself fatigued, and he hurried on with the rest without a word. But how, thought he, had it been possible for these men—or rather their confederates, for, if belonging to the same band, they could hardly have been the same individuals—to carry off Christopher Brown and his delicate daughter ? It was torture to him to think what hardships she must have undergone, if the circumstances of her capture had been in any way similar to his own. Had Corralli himself been present at it ? he wondered ; for that well might be, since his carriage had been coming from the direction of the yacht ; and if so, to whose guardianship had she been now deputed ? Upon such a matter, it was idle to ask any questions, and it might also be injudicious. His best plan seemed to be to remain silent, and to acquire all the information he could by observation.

Throughout that rapid march he beheld but two individuals, shepherds in sheepskin, but each with a species of greatcoat furnished with a *capote*, like those worn by the brigands. He was hurried rapidly by them ; nor did they so much as look up as he passed, being, probably, as anxious to avoid recognition from him as his captors were to keep him from their sight. The whole circumstances of the case were evidently as well understood on one side as on the other. This incident took

place when they had almost reached the top of the mountain, by which time Walter was quite exhausted, as much by famine as fatigue, for he had eaten nothing since he left Palermo, in the early evening.

At last the spot was arrived at which Coralli had intimated from the road three hours ago. It was in many respects admirably fitted for a brigand camp, for not only was it the highest ground in those parts, so that the whole country lay like a map around it, but it sloped down steeply into woods on all sides, so that retreat and concealment were made easy. There was a level plateau of turf upon the summit, with just enough trees to screen its tenants from the observation of those below. The panorama was magnificent, and ranged from the snow-capped top of Etna on the one hand, to Palermo and the sea upon the other. Santoro, a man with thoughtful features, that would have been handsome but for a deep scar that ploughed one side of his face, pointed out the view to his prisoner with great politeness, just as an English host might draw a guest's attention to his home landscape.

"It is beautiful, is it not?" said he. "As the signor is a painter, he will appreciate it."

"There are three things, my friend, that interfere with my admiration of it," replied Walter: "I am cold, I am hungry, and I want to go to sleep."

Santoro checked off these wants upon his fingers, then exclaimed: "Canelli."

The youngest brigand of the band answered to this name; he had, as afterwards appeared, joined it but a few days ago, having killed a man in a quarrel, and was employed for the present as their fag and errand-boy. He was not sixteen, but as tall as the tallest of his companions, and his sharp olive face had a fierce hunted look, like that of a wild beast at bay.

"Food and a capote," said Santoro, and pointed to the forest from which they had just emerged. It seemed to Walter as though he might just as well have demanded a carriage-and-four, so far as any likelihood of his wishes being fulfilled was concerned; but without a word of question, the lad darted like an arrow down the steep, and in a few minutes returned with a complete sheepskin, in the hood of which, as in a basket, were a huge hunch of brown bread and a piece of clotted cream

(called *raccolta*). The bread was bitter, and the cream sour, but Walter enjoyed both amazingly, rather to the disapproval, as it seemed to him, of his two attendants. The fact was, as he subsequently discovered, they argued from his relish of this sort of food, which even they were aware was far from choice, that he had not been accustomed to dainties, and was probably, therefore, by no means rich ; and the conclusion they drew, as it turned out, was not without its advantage to him. As a general rule, it took thirty-six hours of life in the mountains (which means semi-starvation) to bring a rich prisoner down to *raccolta*. The capote was very grateful to Walter, to whose limbs the night-breeze upon the hill-top came piercingly cold ; but at the same time, to one who is not born a brigand, a stolen greatcoat is not so acceptable as stolen kisses are said to be.

"I am afraid," said he, " Santoro, that this coat was taken from one of those poor shepherds whom we met as we came through the wood."

"It was bought, signor, at a just price," answered the other with some haughtiness. "It is not the brigand custom to rob the poor. There are few shepherds who are not willing to sell their capotes for thirty ducats."

"Thirty ducats !" exclaimed Walter, thinking five pounds for a sheepskin rather dear. "Do you mean to say you gave all that money?"

"Certainly ; that is, upon *your account*, signor. It is merely an item added to the ransom you will have to pay. The captain will settle that little matter with you to-morrow. The bread and cream cost only a ducat."

"It seems to me that your hotel bills on the mountain are a little extravagant," remarked Walter.

"That is true, signor, as to the provisions," answered the other naively, but, then, consider you pay nothing for your sleeping accommodation. Here is a dry place out of the wind."

Walter threw himself down, and the two brigands followed his example, lying so close to him that he could not move a limb without their observing it. At first, this was far from displeasing to him, since their proximity helped to warm him ; but presently he became aware that brigands do not use Eau-de-Cologne—nor even common water. The keen air was, in fact,


powerless to purify the atmosphere of that al-fresco dormitory, in which some twenty men were his companions. The four sentinels, two at each end of the little avenue of trees that fringed the hill-top, who kept watchful guard over all, seemed to have had their orders to admit not even the ventilation.

Corralli, with two or three of the band, had withdrawn elsewhere, but a perfect discipline was maintained in his absence. Every two hours, these sentries were relieved by others, who, in addition to their guns and knives, were furnished with field-glasses, with which they swept the distant roads and fields. Not a movement of theirs was lost on Walter, who in vain endeavoured to sleep. Those about him seemed to sink into slumber as soon as their limbs touched the ground. The watchful sentinel became an inanimate lump before the man who had succeeded to his post had paced three times his narrow beat. Conscience might make cowards of these men, but it certainly did not interfere with their repose; the young homicide, who lay on the other side of Colletta, breathed as softly as a child. Not only were all Walter's conventional notions of morality outraged and upset, but the strange and unexpected circumstance of his position rendered his mind a tumultuous sea of thought; retrospect, reflection, and expectation were all jumbled together. Now he was with Jack Pelter, speculating upon the fate of a new picture; now with Lotty, an unwilling witness to her husband's tyranny and coldness; now at Mr. Brown's table, listening to his early struggles after fourpenny-pieces; now watching the yacht as it yawed and drifted without its helmsman; now praying the brigand chief upon his knees to release Lilian, and now clutching him by the throat in fierce revenge because she was dying on his hands. Of all the scenes that floated before his mind, plucked from the past or present, or suggested by the future, she was either the central figure, or they gradually dispersed, and left her in the frameless space. Where was she? How was she being treated? Was she ailing? Was she gone? were questions he asked himself a thousand times, but to which there could be no reply. Nothing was clear to him but the tree-tops against the moonlit sky, and the slow-pacing forms of the brigand sentinels. The astounding change that had befallen him—the sense that he was no longer a free agent, but that his very life was at the mercy of a reck-

less robber—confused his judgment. Above all, since nothing was within his own control, he could make no plans to succour either himself or others ; he was not even a portion of a machine, like a soldier in warfare ; not even a waif upon the sea, which, at least, has tides, and the winds, whose direction can to some extent be calculated. He could not make even a guess at the thoughts that lay beneath the broad hat of Captain Corralli, who had obtained the sole dominion over him, and by whose gracious forbearance he was for the present permitted to draw breath. And so he lay unrestful, till the stilly dawn began to glow up on the mountain's peaks, and birds and beasts and creeping things began to awake to the liberty that was denied to him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CAPTAIN AND HIS CAPTIVE.

NLESS brigands are pursued, they are not apt to be in a hurry, any more than other fine gentlemen who have time to spare, and no wretched mechanical profession ; and the morning was far advanced before the camp on the hill-top began to bestir itself, and think of breakfast. This was a great advantage to Walter, who had fallen asleep at last under the warm rays of the sun, and was dreaming that Mr. Christopher Brown was his father-in-law, a relationship which involved even still more satisfactory conditions of existence. When he awoke, he found Il Capitano Corrali sitting on the ground at his feet, with pens, ink, and paper placed on the turf before him, and with quite a business-like expression of countenance.

"I have a little matter to arrange with you, signor," said the captain affably : "it will only demand a scratch of your pen."

"What ! before breakfast ?" inquired Walter jocosely, for he had already discovered that it was well to fall in with brigand humour.

"As you please," replied the other.—"Boy !" He made some gesture signifying food, and the youthful homicide was beside them in an instant with a cabbage—apparently frost-bitten—some garlic, and a sausage, black, and of an intense hardness. There did not happen to be any bread in the encampment, and the coffee was represented by some melted snow, which had been found in a sort of natural ice-house on the hilltop. Walter's teeth were excellent, his appetite keen, and, moreover, he wished to appear much at his ease and without apprehension. The captain watched the sausage disappear with a gloomy brow.

"You take matters easy, signor," said he softly ; "doubtless, you are pretty confident of soon returning to your friends,"

"I have no friends to return to, in this country, Captain Corrali," answered Walter frankly; "but, as to my cheerfulness, there is a proverb that a man with empty pockets is not cast down by falling among thieves."

"That may be so in England, signor," returned the captain gravely; "but with us brigands it is different: when we cannot take a man's purse, we take his skin. Now, listen, and be sure you do not tell me a lie. At what hotel are you staying in Palermo?"

"At no hotel; I cannot afford their charges. I have been residing for the last few weeks at Signor Baccari's, on the Marina."

"A very good house," remarked the captain.

"That is as people think."

"Oh! doubtless, you are accustomed to much better lodgings in England, where they give large sums to artists for pictures. You live on the fat of the land, and sleep on down—there is no doubt of that."

"I am sorry to say, you are mistaken, captain. It is possible that some day I may win a name, and command good prices for my handiwork, but at present I am ill off enough; I have not even, what every Englishman of property possesses when he comes abroad—a banker. You may find out that for yourself. All the available cash I have in the world is in a table-drawer of my bedroom at Signor Baccari's. It is about eighty pounds—not five hundred ducats."

"Bah!" answered the captain incredulously. "You are down here"—he pointed to the paper—"for three thousand; and I seldom make a mistake in my valuations. This is the place for your signature."

"I cannot sign what I have not read," said Walter quietly.

A very ugly look indeed crossed the captain's face, a look that gave an insight into the nature of the man, between which and his prisoner's eyes had hitherto been kept up a screen of courtesy and affected good humour. "Do you know," he began, in a harsh grating voice, "that you are just the sort of person one sometimes burns alive?—Well, read it."

Walter took the paper, on which was written, in a sprawling hand, a few words of Sicilian, so ill spelled that he found it very difficult to discover in his pocket dictionary for what they were intended;

"I am in the hands of Corrali ; he requires three thousand ducats for my ransom, which, if not sent within a few days, I shall be in danger. The sum must be paid in gold, and in such a manner as you shall be informed of. If my life is dear to you, hasten this."

"I have no objection to sign the paper," observed Walter calmly ; "but I give you my word that I have not this money, nor any means of procuring it."

The captain smiled incredulously as he put the pen in his hand, and Walter wrote his signature in the place indicated.

"You told me you had no friends among your fellow-countrymen here, signor ; had you not better reconsider that statement ? Do not lie to me twice—it is sometimes for the second lie that I shoot a man."

"I am not in the habit of lying, Captain Corrali," answered Walter firmly. "I told you I had no friends 'to return to,' and that is true. There are four English persons in Sicily with whom I am acquainted ; but, as it happens, they are not even aware of my having left London. You can verify this for yourself, if you have a mind ; for two of them are, I believe, in your custody. When I was taken up by your carriage on the road yonder, I told you as much."

"I thought you might have forgotten it," said the other coldly. "It is not every one who has so good a memory about trifles. It is unfortunate that half your acquaintance should be in the same boat as yourself. Now for the other half. Who are they ?"

"I am acquainted with Sir Reginald Selwyn and his wife, who are at present stopping at the *Hôtel de France*, on the Marina, but who go to-day by the steamer to Messina."

"Not they," said the captain, smiling. "However, this looks like truth. I should have been sorry to have had to kill a lad like you. It was touch-and-go, though, let me tell you ; for my temper is but short, and I was getting angry. Well, then, instead of addressing this little note to your landlord, it will go to Sir Reginald Selwyn ; he is rich, and will never let a fellow-countryman be put under ground before his time, for the sake of three thousand ducats."

"Captain Corrali," cried Walter earnestly, as the brigand stooped down to write, "I abjure you not to do that. This

gentleman, although he is acquainted with me, is not my friend ; nay, worse—he is my enemy. I would rather die—if death must be the alternative—than make appeal to such a man.”

“How droll !” exclaimed the brigant coldly, finishing the address. “You would rather be shot than ask a favour, would you ? Well, I have nothing to do with these fine feelings, you see ; though, at the same time, I admire them. This English milord will perhaps pay for you, out of spite, and in order to put you under a humiliating obligation. I am sorry, but I have only to look to my own interests and that of my comrades.”

“He will not pay one ducat for me,” said Walter confidently.

“Then I shall be still more sorry for myself, and also for you. This is no child’s play, signor, that I am proposing,” added he, with sudden ferocity. “I will have your gold, or your blood. I mean it. This letter will reach Palermo before sunset ; and if within ten days——”

“Look yonder, captain ; the soldiers !”

It was the sentinel who spoke, and at the same time handed his field-glass to Corrali.

The high road on which Walter had been captured on the previous night, could be seen winding like a narrow ribbon at their feet, though at a great distance ; in one part of it could now be seen, with the naked eye, like ants upon the march, certain small dark masses moving.

The next instant, Walter was thrown violently to the ground, face foremost.

“Do not stir, or you are a dead man,” whispered a stern voice, that of his guard Colletta, in his ear. All the other tenants of the encampment had prostrated themselves ; those who were near the edge of the hill were talking rapidly to their companions, probably giving them notice of what was passing ; but they spoke in some sort of *argot*, which, for Walter, had no meaning. The others answered with oaths and curses. No one seemed alarmed, but every one transported with fury, Even Santoro—the mildest of the gang—looked towards his captive menacingly.

“If your Englishman has done this, sir,” cried Corrali, white with passion, and pointing to the troops, “You are right, indeed, to deem him your enemy ; for if harm should come of

it, he has signed your death-warrant and that of others also. I have never yet shot a woman, but there is no knowing to what one may not be forced."

Walter knew that this wretch was referring to Lilian, and his heart sank low within him. Was it possible that Heaven could permit such a deed? But, alas, were there not martyrdoms in the world now as of old; tyrannies, oppressions of the gentle by the strong; sufferings of the innocent, inexplicable to the believers in dominant Good! If such a horror should take place, Walter felt that he should have but one thing to pray for—to be one minute alone with her murderer, that he might pluck him limb from limb with his hands. At the very thought, the rage of a wild beast possessed him, his teeth met together, and stuck fast, his eyes became too large for their sockets, his fingers crooked themselves like the talons of a bird.

"If your gentleman moves, Santoro," observed the captain grimly, to whom such indications of passion were probably not unfamiliar, "blow his brains out."

These ebullitions of bad feeling on the part of the brigands manifested themselves, for the most part, within a very short space of time, and lasted only so long as the cause of them—namely, the soldiers—remained visible. As these latter pursued their eastward march, and disappeared along the road, the general excitement became allayed. The troops were obviously not in sufficient force to surround the mountain (even if they had known the position of their enemies), and to cut off the band from their supplies, and this was the only danger the brigands really dreaded. Those who were not on guard proceeded with their morning meal, or, having finished it, began to gamble. What the game was, Walter could not quite determine; it seemed a sort of "odd and even" of the simplest kind, but the stakes were considerable—indeed, there was nothing played for under gold coin—and the voices and temper of the players were at least as high as their stakes. Every moment, Walter expected to see knives out and blood drawn, but the dispute never went beyond big words and black looks. Corrali alone—though, as he afterwards shewed himself, a most desperate gambler—took no part in their amusements, nor gave any signs of returning good-humour. He was for ever turning

his field-glass in the direction which the troops had taken, although it was scarcely possible, by reason of the configuration of the country, that they should again come into view. Walter acquitted him of any apprehensions upon his own account, and rightly concluded that his anxiety was excited for the safety of the other portion of the band, in whose custody were his more valuable prisoners. Impeded by Lilian's company, it was probable, notwithstanding some hours of "start," that they had not attained a position so safe and advantageous as the camp upon the hill, which, indeed, had not been reached without great toil and trouble.

Presently, after long and apparently deep cogitation, the captain shut his glass, and joined the throng of revellers. His brown face, if no longer smiling, had at least lost its scowl; and the voice that could be so short and fierce, was once more courteous in its tone as he addressed his prisoner: "You know this English milord and his daughter, it seems?" he said.

"I am acquainted with them, although as I told you, they are not even aware of my presence in this country."

"You must have a deep regard for them, however, to run twelve miles of road, in order (as you foolishly imagined) to bring them succour by calling out the troops."

"I have a deep regard for them, Captain Corrali."

"Which involves your knowing their private circumstances," observed the captain quickly.

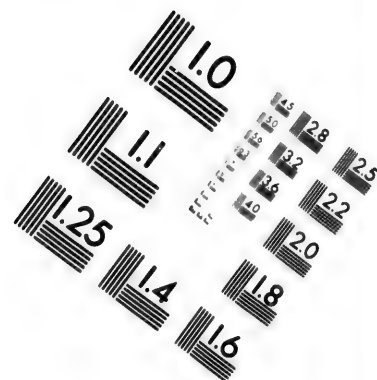
"Not so. I know, of course, that Mr. Brown—he is no milord at all, but a plain merchant—is a wealthy man; but as to the actual extent of his means, I can say nothing."

"Or will not, eh?" replied the other incredulously. "You are an obstinate lad; but I have known others equally determined, whose mouths I have found means to open. Otherwise," he added with a terrible look, "when a man will not speak, I cut out his tongue."

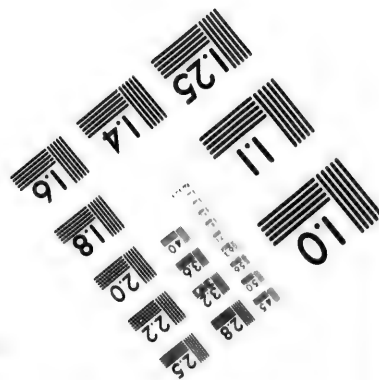
"I am quite aware I am in your power," said Walter calmly; "but I can only tell what I know."

After a long pause: "What is a ship such as the *Sylphide* worth?" asked Corrali abruptly.

"I am a landsman, and can give you no information on that head for certain," replied Walter. "Perhaps twelve thousand ducats."

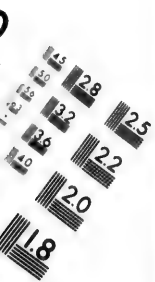


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"The income of a man who keeps such a vessel for his amusement must therefore be very large—ten times that sum at least."

"It is very unlikely. There are not many men, even in England, who possess such a fortune as that."

"If a man gives that sum for a pleasure-boat, what would he give, think you, for a ransom for his daughter?" asked Corrali slowly.

"He would give all he had to spare, no doubt, so long as she was alive; but if you kill her—it is no matter whether by accident or design; so delicate a creature might perish of one night's exposure to the cold——" A shadow flitted across Corrali's face; and Walter felt that the arrow he had aimed at a venture had gone home. "I say, if she died upon your hands, not only would such an atrocity raise every man's hand against you, mine for one—yes, I say, in that case, you had better kill me also, Captain Corrali, for should any evil happen to her" (the picture thus drawn by his own imagination of Lilian's possible fate was too much for Walter's patience; rage had got the better of diplomacy), "I swear to Heaven I would never rest till I had avenged it."

"Let us confine ourselves to business, Signor Litton," answered the captain coolly. "Emotions are out of place here; and as for the luxury of revenge, that is not for captives, but for him who holds them at his mercy. We were speaking of Milord Brown and the ransom."

"Yes; I was about to say that if his daughter's health should give way, by reason of this rough mode of life, you would miss your mark, besides raising the whole country against you. Existence would not be worth purchasing to the old man, if you once deprived him of his child."

"You think it would be killing the goose with the golden egg, do you?" said Corrali thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right. It is better to look at these matters from all sides. I suppose this young lady, being so rich, has had a first-rate education; knows foreign languages—Italian, for example?"

"I believe so. She told me on one occasion that she had studied it."

"And her father?" This question was put with an indifferent air, but Walter noticed that the captain's eyes here regarded him with peculiar intensity.

"I should think Mr. Brown knew little of Italian—much less of Sicilian. Indeed, I may positively state that he is unacquainted with any tongue beside his own."

The captain frowned, and looked perplexed. "Corbara!" cried he, after a minute's thought, and beckoned to the man who acted as his lieutenant. This was an ill-looking, stunted fellow, with a bull neck, and arms as long as those of an ape. He had been unlucky at his "odd and even," and, as he rose sullenly to his feet, cast a look at Walter, as though he would like to make his prisoner's skin pay for his own ill-fortune. The captain and this worthy conferred for several minutes in low tones, the former pointing once or twice to eastward, in the direction of the sea, and then Corralli, taking his gun from the place where the arms were stacked, went down the hill alone. Whither he was gone, or on what errand, Walter, of course, could only guess, but he felt pretty certain that his departure was connected with Lilian and her father. The questioning to which he had just been subjected gave him extreme anxiety, for why should the captain have inquired as to Lilian's knowledge of Italian (since he had certainly been in her company), unless she were too ill to speak? Would he have been so moved, too, by Walter's hint at the delicacy of her constitution, unless she had already shewn some signs of its giving way? As to his inquiries about the old merchant, it was probable that Corralli had suspected him of pretending ignorance of the language, in order to avoid debate upon the ransom. Upon the whole, was it not likely that he (Walter) should be employed as an interpreter between the brigands and his captives? Even in the evil case in which he stood, he felt his heart beat high at the thought of his seeing these companions in misfortune. If he could only be of use to Lilian—if his late advice should in the end obtain her freedom—it would not seem so hard to die.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BRIGAND DISCIPLINE.

IT is only the old to whom "the clouds return after the rain," to whom misfortune is but the prelude to misfortune, and no sunshine illumines the interval ; with the young, the sun is always shining, ready to take advantage of the passing cloud, or to pierce through its less heavy folds, even as it intervenes. Within one hour of Corrali's departure, Walter Litton had his sketch-book out, and was pencilling the picturesque surroundings of his prison, not without some sense of pleasure in the employment. Curiously enough, the brigands robbed him of nothing, but only convinced themselves that he carried no weapons of offence. He knew that this forbearance was not usual with them, that, in ordinary cases, his watch and chain would have at once been added to the profuse adornments of his captors' persons ; and that this had not been done, gave him additional disquiet, for it shewed that Corrali & Co. were bent upon some great *coup*, in which all minor considerations were merged, as of no account. That this project could not be connected with himself alone, was certain ; for even if the amount which the chief had set his ransom at could be forthcoming, it was but a small sum, as ransoms went ; and, indeed, that would have been only another reason why they would have taken all they could. He had an idea, too, that, considering their slender expectations from his capture, he had been treated with unusual tenderness, and consideration. However, now that he was at work with his pencil, all these reflections were in abeyance ; he was only thinking what a fine model Colletta would have made in Beech Street, where he could not have shifted his position three times a minute, as he was now doing, as he leaned up against a pine tree and watched the gamblers. He was a magnificent fellow, with a long pointed beard, and, except for an expression of interest now lighting up his soft black eyes, as the gold clinked, might have been

elder brother to Francisco. He was by far the tallest of the band, and probably, except Corbara, the most physically powerful; but he had a delicate skin, and that was why he kept rubbing himself, as cattle do, and I believe for a similar reason, against the pine. It would have been a satisfaction to Walter, had he not been in their immediate neighbourhood, to reflect that all these scoundrels were overrun with fleas, and worse.

"It is wonderful!" said a musical voice (redolent of garlic) beside him; "I have seen nothing like it since I beheld the altar-piece at Termini."

The speaker was Santoro, who, peering over his shoulder, was regarding his little sketch with a look of intense admiration. Walter did not think very much of provincial altar-pieces in Sicily (judging from what he had seen of those in its metropolis), but this natural incense was acceptable, nevertheless.

"It would be better worth your attention if your friend would stand still," said Walter, smiling. "Why does he not join the game, like the others?"

"We are forbidden—he and I—to do so."

"Oh, I see; for fear I should give you the slip."

"Yes, signor; you see" (this apologetically) "one is obliged to obey orders. Would it be asking too much, when you have done with Colletta, if you would do a picture of me?"

"By all means," answered Walter good-naturedly. "Never mind Colletta; if you will stand quiet, or, better still, sit down, I will do it at once."

"I must trouble the signor to sit down also," replied the other hesitatingly. "You see, one is obliged——"

His sense of duty, struggling with the desire to conciliate, was most amusing to behold; nor did it escape Walter's quick eye, that, in taking up his position, the brigand took care to present his face in profile, so that the scar which disfigured one half of it was scarcely to be discerned.

"This portrait is for your lady-love, I presume?" said Walter.

"Yes, signor; for Lavocca;" answered the other in grave low tones, and with an uneasy glance over his shoulder at his companions.

"And who is Lavocca?" asked Walter, not so much from

curiosity, as to secure a good sitting ; he had now guessed the reason of Santoro's exceptional reserve and silence—for when they were not absolutely menaced with danger, the brigands, as a rule, were as noisy as boys just let loose from school ; this gentleman was consumed by the tender passion.

"Lavocca is the attendant of Joanna, signor, and her dearest friend."

"And who—— Hold your head a little less stiffly, my good fellow." Here the thought struck Walter, that the last person whom his pencil had sketched—alas, how different, and under what different circumstances!—was Lilian, and somehow the reflection made him feel a kindliness for this poor sufferer, charged with the task of shooting him, if he ran a yard, and yet, who had tender hopes of his own, with perhaps as slender chances of their fulfilment as himself. "And who is Joanna?"

Santoro opened his dark eyes to their full stretch. The question was evidently as extraordinary to him as though some benighted being, on hearing mention of the pope, had inquired: "And who is the pope?"

"Joanna—surely the signor must have heard—is the captain's sister: the handsomest woman I ever saw—save one ; but——" Here he threw his hands up, instead of finishing the sentence.

"Ah, with a devil of a temper, I suppose?" said Walter. "Some handsome women are troubled in that way."

His tone was careless, but in reality he had become greatly interested ; for, from what Francisco had told him about this woman, it was probable that Lilian herself might at this moment be in her custody.

"Temper, yes. Why, the captain himself is at times afraid of her. How Lavocca can put up with it, astonishes me ; but she says her mistress has a good heart ; indeed, she is both kind and generous ; and there is no doubt that she has been cruelly tried. When one is young, and things go hard with one, that makes the blood run wrong for the rest of one's life, you see."

"It is too likely, Santoro. But would you mind telling me her story?"

"Lavocca's story, signor?" inquired the other with simplicity, and a blush upon his dishonest cheek.

"No, no ; I would not venture to be so inquisitive. I wish to hear about Joanna, and this captain of yours, of whom everybody knows the history, I believe, but myself."

"Well, the captain—though you would never imagine it from his grand airs—was at one time but a poor farm-servant. Much intercourse with gentlemen such as yourself, and even great milords, who have been his guests from time to time, as well as his own high position"—here the brigand drew himself up, as though he too, if not the rose (which, in the literal sense, he was most certainly not), was near the rose, "have made him what he is ; but at nineteen he was just a farmer's boy, such as one may meet any day in the fields down yonder, except that he had a noble soul."

"That is a fine thing to have," observed Walter dryly.

"True, signor ; it makes one independent of everything : a man who possesses it, is a king, and knows himself equal to kings. Whereupon, it came about that Rocco Corrali fell in love with his master's daughter. He was not to blame for that, you will allow ; if he had been of the same rank, nobody would have blamed him ; but as it was, complexities arose. The brothers of the girl fell upon him with their knives, and left him for dead."

"What ! merely for being smitten by their sister's charms ? Is it not possible that they may have led him into some imprudence ?"

"Perhaps," returned Santoro, with a judicial air ; "it must be confessed that that has been said. His body was taken into the church, to be left till morning ; but in the night he revived, and dragged himself to the mountains, where there were some fine fellows like ourselves, who received him gladly. Among us, there is a field for merit, and the best man is nearly certain to come uppermost."

"Corbara, for example," said Walter, slyly. "Do you think yourself a worse man than Corbara, or less fit to govern ? I am quite sure Lavocca does not."

"Well, well ; of course, everything is not perfect even up in the mountains ! Please Heaven, Corbara will be shot some day, and it will be better for such as you, signor, when it happens."

"Corbara is a brute, I suppose ?" observed Walter carelessly.

"Yes, indeed; or if he is a man, he has no heart. He would always rather have blood than ransom. As for me, I have no cause to love him, since I owe him this," and he touched the scar that furrowed his left cheek from eye to chin. "It was a fair fight enough—we had a duel—but then one can't forget such things."

"And yet you must obey him, or men like him," said Walter softly, "and be a witness to his vile brutalities. Now, supposing it were possible that I could procure your pardon, as well as fill your pockets——"

"It is useless, signor," interrupted the other coldly; "such propositions have been made to me before to-day. You are about to propose some scheme of escape."

"No, indeed; I have no such intention: I merely wished to know if the opportunity of living another sort of life—with Lavocca—should offer itself to you"——

"It never will, it never can. Thousand devils! why should we talk of such matters!" broke in the brigand impatiently. "We were speaking of Corrali. Well, in course of time he became captain of the band. It was not in that year, nor in the next, but however long it was, he had not forgotten upon the mountain what had happened down yonder. One Sunday morning, when the folks were all in the village church in which he had been left for dead, he descended with his men, and surrounded it. The congregation were made to file before him. Two of the brothers of Carmina (that was the girl's name) were among them; those he slew with his own hand, and three others who had crouched behind the altar were shot down. Then he went to the house of his old master, and stabbed him to the heart; and carried off the girl with him into the mountains."

"What an infernal monster?" ejaculated Walter.

The brigand shrugged his shoulders. "It was unfortunate that the family were so numerous, but it was necessary to be revenged. However, Carmina never took to him, in consequence of what he had done; and after a few months—it is sad to think of it, considering how fond they had once been of one another—he shot her, in a fit of exasperation."

It was with difficulty that Walter restrained himself from expressing his abhorrence, not only of this narration, but of the narrator himself, who could speak of such things with such

calmness and indifference ; but he made no comment beyond a gesture of disgust. "And what is the story of Joanna ?" inquired he.

"Well, Joanna's case was, as it were, the reverse of Carmina's ; she, too, was in farm-service, and solicited by her master's son, whose affection she did not return. Some say she stabbed him, but Lavocca, whom I believe before anybody, denies that it was so. It was more probably the captain that did it, whom Joanna had informed of her persecutions. At all events, she joined the band, and Lavocca, who was her inseparable companion, did likewise. They did not come, you must understand, signor, as women mostly do, who take of their own free-will to our mountain life, after their lovers."

"I see, Joanna could not well have come without Lavocca, who, to keep her company, sacrificed her own prospects 'down yonder.'"—Walter had already fallen into the brigand habit of describing all scenes of civilized life by those two words. "It is no wonder that she is Joanna's friend."

"Indeed, she has a right to be so considered, signor, even though Joanna is a great lady. Talk of merit. There is a woman for you ! She can shoot and swim, run like a deer, cook like an angel, and is withal so beautiful ! Should anything happen to Corrali, I, for one, should range myself under her command—not this one's," and he jerked his finger contemptuously towards Corbara, who was still shrieking curses against his ill-luck.

"And notwithstanding all these accomplishments," inquired Walter, "is Joanna womanly and tender towards those persons who fall into her brother's hands ?"

"Well, she has an eye for a handsome fellow, it is said, whether he be bond or free," answered Santoro, laughing ; "but that is what men are sure to say in any case."

Whether this man had wilfully misunderstood his question, being unwilling to give Joanna the cruel character she might deserve, or whether any other sort of tenderness than that he referred to was altogether out of Santoro's consideration, Walter could not determine. The information he had received was indeed but vague and general, but with that, for the present, he thought it prudent to be content. To exhibit curiosity was, in brigands' eyes, Francisco had once told him, to be plot-

ting, and though Santoro seemed friendly disposed, he had a stolid sense of professional duty, and it would be dangerous to excite his suspicions. "If Joanna likes handsome men, Santoro, you give her this," said Walter gravely, handing his companion the little portrait which he had now finished.

The delight of Santoro at this counterfeit presentment of himself, as he probably considered it, though it must be confessed Walter had taken care to flatter him, was extreme, and could only be likened to that of a savage who first sees himself in a mirror: his expressions of admiration were so loud that they attracted not only his mate Colletta, but the gamblers themselves, who came crowding about him, like children at a peep-show.

"Wonderful!" "Fine!" "Excellent!" One would have thought that no one had sketched the human figure since Michael Angelo's time.

"What is all this about?" broke in the rough tones of Corbara. He plucked the portrait from the hands of its original, and made as though he would have torn it in pieces.

"Stop!" cried Santoro in a voice shrill with passion; his musket, fortunately for his foe, was not within reach, but his hand sought the knife in his girdle. The next minute, a blow from the lieutenant's pistol-stock levelled him, stunned and bleeding, to the ground. If the onslaught had been less violent, and Santoro had been able to take his own part in the matter, it is possible that he might have gained the victory over his superior, for the feelings of the great majority of the band were clearly with him. They had even supplemented, as it were, his "Stop!" with several cries expressive of disapprobation at Corbara's meditated act of vandalism. But now that the man was down who might have proved their ringleader, authority was paramount, and neither tongue nor finger stirred in rebellion against it. Only Colletta quietly brought a handful of half-melted snow, and, kneeling down beside his fallen comrade, proceeded to wipe the blood from his unconscious face. Nevertheless, it seemed to strike the bull-necked lieutenant that discipline had been sufficiently vindicated, and that even some sort of apology might be expected of him.

"This rubbish here," said he, still holding the sketch in his left hand, "is either worthless or dangerous. If it resembles

the man, it is clear that it may be used to identify him, should this English dog ever gain his liberty. Would it be for your advantage if he took a portrait of every one of you, and stuck them up in Palermo, so that the soldiers should know you wherever you moved? If, on the other hand, it is not like him, it is of no value to any one."

The logic might have been incontrovertible, but it waked no round of approbation; for the fact was, that every one of the party had been privately bent on getting his own portrait done in the same style.

"What you suggest might have had some sense, Corbara," observed Walter boldly, "had I intended to keep the sketch for myself; but I had given it to Santoro, and am willing to do the same for any one else who has a fancy for having his portrait taken, and a mistress to whom to send it."

He rightly guessed that it was a point of honour with these gentry that each should suppose himself, or at least have it supposed, that he was the object of some young woman's devotion; but in this case he had unconsciously hit a particular nail on the head, and sent it home. It was well known among the band that the lieutenant was an unsuccessful suitor for Lavocca's affections; and Walter's speech at once suggested to them that Corbara's wish to destroy the picture, as well as his subsequent arguments, had arisen from jealousy; a passion in regard to which they themselves were as tinder to flame, but which amused them, when manifested in another, beyond everything.

"Come, come, lieutenant," said one, "what the signor says is reasonable enough; we need only shew the pictures to whom we like—and who like us."

"Yes, and when shall we have such another chance?" pleaded another. "It is not as though we could go into the towns, and get our pictures taken by the sun for half a ducat, like those who live down yonder."

Walter did not trouble himself to listen to these arguments, or to the lieutenant's reply to them; he had found it hard enough to give the man the few civil words which he had bestowed upon him, with that spectacle of his brutality—the prostrate form of the unlucky Santoro—before his eyes. Now, he had knelt down by the side of Colletta, and was assisting

him in his simple ministrations to the wounded man. His impulse had been to spring at Corbara's throat, and do him such mischief as a moment's fury could effect ; but he had mastered it, and wisely. It would have been a Quixotic act indeed to bring death upon himself (for Corbara would to a certainty have killed him), and perhaps fail in saving others, because one rogue was brutal and unjust to another. Still, Santoro had been friendly towards him, and he was not going to withhold the hand of sympathy from him for fear of this insolent bully. As it happened, therefore, it was upon Walter's pitying face that the eyes of the poor brigand first opened upon his regaining consciousness.

"The picture !" murmured he. "Where is the picture for Lavocca ?"

"You shall have it, or another," said Walter comfortingly—"Have you brandy ?" inquired he of Canelli, whom the condition of the wounded man appeared to interest, not from tenderness of heart, but because blood had a natural attraction for him. "It will be the best medicine for your friend."

"I have a little," returned the juvenile homicide stolidly—"about as much as I want for myself. He shall have a drain of it, however, if you will draw my picture."

So it seemed that Lieutenant Corbara had taken off his embargo upon art, and had graciously permitted his men to sit to Walter.

This permission was of no slight advantage to the prisoner, both immediate and remote, for not only did it put him on amiable terms with his patrons, but when the hour for the mid-day meal arrived, and with it only loaves of black bread, without even the *raccolta* of the previous evening, he found his loaf had been filled by some grateful hand with pieces of broiled kid. It was a contribution, Colletta whispered to him, from his sitters generally, but of which he was to say nothing, because of Corbara, who would otherwise have deprived him of it ; and he enjoyed it hugely, and none the less because he gave a share of it to Santoro. The poor fellow was little the worse for his maltreatment—the blow had fortunately fallen upon his skull—and seemed in no way to resent it. Punishment under authority, as Walter had more than one occasion to observe, was not looked upon as an indignity among brigands, though they were quick enough to avenge an insult.]

After dinner, the disadvantages of open-air life became very perceptible, in the shape of a driving rain, from which, in their elevated situation, there was but little shelter. It was intensely cold, and yet the brigands dared light no fire, for fear of announcing the position of the camp to the soldiers. Nothing was to be done but for all (save the sentinels) to wrap themselves up in their capotes, and huddle together as close as sheep frightened by a dog. His companions, accustomed to sleep in the daytime, and move at night, soon forgot their discomforts in slumber; but Walter was not so fortunate. He lay for hours listening to the sough of the wind, the swish of the rain, and had, as it seemed to him, only just fallen asleep, when a kick on the leg awoke him, accompanied by a rough order to "get up." It was fine overhead, though by no means clear, and the moon was rising, by the light of which—though the manner of his summons would have sufficiently established the man's identity—he perceived Corbara, his musket sloped over his shoulder, and evidently prepared for departure.

"Santoro," said this worthy, in tones that he endeavoured to make conciliatory, "you are still an invalid, it seems" (and indeed the poor fellow, with his broken head, bandaged with a napkin, through which much blood had flowed, looked by no means able-bodied); "so you will be excused from your attendance on the prisoner, and command in camp in my absence. Canelli will take your place on the march."

"Pardon me, lieutenant," answered he firmly; "I am quite well now, and have received my orders direct from the captain; and I mean to obey them. Strike me again"—for Corbara was already feeling for his pistol, the barrel of which seemed as familiar to his fingers as the trigger doubtless was—"and you will have to settle with him the Who-shall-be-Master question *a second time*."

Even by that dim light, Walter could see the lieutenant turn yellow with rage; the allusion was evidently a very bitter one, and yet one which he dared not resent.

"I shall have a word or two to say to the captain about you, my fine fellow," was his sole rejoinder.

"Just so; that is one of the reasons why I intend to accompany you, lieutenant. It is only right he should hear both sides."

"I believe you to be half a traitor," answered Corbara fiercely. "You are quite unfit to be trusted with the care of a prisoner, you who receive gifts at his hands, and make yourself his friend. You require some one to look after *you*, and Canelli shall do it."

At these words, the young recruit stepped up, gun in hand, with a malevolent grin, and stationed himself on Santoro's left. It was an indignity, as Walter could perceive, which touched his old body-guard to the quick, who, next to Corbara, was the senior member of the band; but he said nothing. About a dozen brigands had been selected for the expedition, the rest remaining in camp. At the word "March!" given in quite a military style, they set out; but there was not much marching, in the ordinary sense. The ground did not even permit of a foot-pace; it was so steep that they had to run, except where the brushwood was so thick that they could make way through it with difficulty. Their course was eastward, but also, as Walter fancied, towards the sea. Under the circumstances, some straggling was absolutely necessary, and but that Canelli kept always close behind, and within striking distance of him, it would have been easy, with Santoro's connivance, to have made his escape. In any case, however, as he judged, this connivance he would not have obtained. That Santoro detested his present leader, and was burning with indignation against him, was probable enough; nay, even that he was favourably disposed towards his prisoner; but, nevertheless, Walter felt that, had he made an effort to flee, this man would have drawn trigger on him as quickly as any of his fellows, nay, perhaps all the quicker, because his fidelity had been called in question. That he was correct in his opinion, was shown by a trifling circumstance. After they had gone a mile or two, they crossed a small stream, at which every one stooped to drink, for streams are rare in Sicily, and they had had nothing hitherto to quench their thirst, save melted snow. Walter took the opportunity to wash his hands and face, which he had not done for twenty-four hours: his delay was not of half a minute's duration, yet the purpose of it being misconstrued (and perhaps unintelligible, for brigands never wash), it almost cost him his life. "Get on, or I shoot!" cried Santoro, in a voice from which all friendliness had given way to a cer-

tain fierce ring of duty ; and this was accompanied by the ominous click of three guns. Walter made some laughing remonstrance, and though the incident dashed certain vague hopes he had began to cherish, did not permit it to interrupt his amiable relations with Santoro. Nor did the latter appear to treat it otherwise than as a matter of official routine, such as no person holding a commission from Il Capitano Corrali could have dispensed with.

"Can you guess, signor," said he, in a low voice, when they chanced to be crossing what was, by contrast, a piece of level ground, "why the lieutenant was so civil just now as to make me his deputy in his absence, if I would have accepted the honour?"

"To make up, I suppose, for his brutal attack upon you yesterday."

"No, no, signor ; he is not one to eat his words nor repent his deeds. He wished to keep me from seeing Lavocca. He wanted to have her all to himself."

"So we are going to join the ladies, are we?" inquired Walter, with a carelessness that he could ill assume. The thought that he was about to behold Lilian, filled him with a wild delight, in spite of the sad circumstances under which their meeting must needs take place.


"Yes, I am sure of it. I saw that Corbara had put his rings on."

This statement was quite unintelligible to Walter, and an accession of speed on the part of his companions—for they used level ground as though it were a race-course—prevented any explanation. Presently, however, a halt was made for refreshment, and then he saw Santoro produce from his pockets a number of little tin boxes, containing various articles of jewellery, with which he proceeded with much gravity to adorn his person ; just as a serious young man with us puts on his go-to-meeting coat, and makes his face to shine with yellow soap, before he goes a-courting. Walter guessed, from these preparations, that they were near the termination of their journey ; but, for the rest of the way, the party moved much more slowly, and with exceeding vigilance. They had now got "down yonder," where honest people were to be found (in moderate numbers), and even people whose mission it was to put down

brigands : a large and fertile valley, through which ran a high road, that they crossed with the most elaborate precautions, sending scouts to left and right, and then flitting athwart it with the swiftness and silence of a shadow. Here was another mountain to be climbed, not so steep as that whose summit they had lately occupied, but much more wooded and difficult ; and ever and anon they stopped, as if in doubt, and as though the place was new to them. At these times, it seemed to Walter that he could hear the soft murmur of the tideless Mediterranean ; but when he expressed that belief, Colletta jeered at it, and told him the coast was not within five leagues of them. Walter had by this time discovered, however, that, notwithstanding Captain Corrali was so exacting from his captives in the way of truth, this was the very last commodity to be expected from the members of his band ; they lied to their prisoners, they lied to one another, and if they gave themselves any trouble to prove to their own minds that they had any justification for their mode of life, they most unquestionably lied to themselves ; therefore, Walter stuck to his opinion as respected his propinquity to the sea. It somehow pleased him to think that it was so. To be taken inland, was to be removed farther from the hope of escape, and, as it seemed to him, from the neighbourhood of Lilian. He conjectured that it would have been impossible for the brigands to have carried her very far from the coast, and the course of the present expedition had corroborated that conviction. The dawn had now broken, fair and calm, yet so woody was the mountain on whose slope they were, that it seemed still dusk. Again and again, Corbara put his fingers to his lips, and whistled the brigand note, and waited for a reply in vain. But at last he was answered. Sweet and low, the kissing call stole down from the summit of the mountain, so mellowed by distance, and rendered so harmonious by time and place, that Walter hardly recognised it for what it was.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FIXING THE PRICE.

N hearing the answering cry from their comrades, the party pushed up the hill, and presently came upon a level lawn, surrounded with fine trees, each a leafy tent, since their branches descended to the ground, so as to form shelter from rain or sun; a brook babbled down its centre, and by its side were tethered sheep and goats. Nor did this pastoral scene lack more romantic elements, for, beside the sheep, instead of shepherds, lay, wooing the morning sun, the main body of the brigand band, some thirty men, scarcely any of whom had yet reached middle life, and bedizened in such finery as only children or savages could elsewhere have found a pleasure in wearing. The pistols stuck in their gay scarfs, and the muskets piled in the centre of the lawn, suggested a company of amateur actors rehearsing some exquisite *tableau vivant*, after Salvator Rosa, rather than what they really were—a band of bloodshedders and ruffians. They jumped up with a shout of welcome, as the new-comers made their appearance, and crowded around Walter with signs of great excitement, and a continuous chatter, of which he could make nothing, but which was probably concerning his market-value in ducats. Then some one cried out, “Il Capitano,” and these inquisitive gentry melted away from him as if by magic, and Corrali himself stood before him with outstretched hand.

“Welcome, signor, to our country-house,” said he, smiling. “I cannot say that I hope to see you long here; but while you are with us, you shall have no cause to complain of our hospitality.”

Walter’s mind and eyes were wandering from tree to tree, in speculation as to which might form the bower of Lilian; but he made shift to make some civil response to this greeting—the courtesy of which he set down at its just value. It was evi-

dent that the brigand chief required something of him beside his ransom.

"Your friends in Palermo——"

"I have no friends there," interrupted Walter quickly.

"Well, well; those, then, who miscall themselves your friends, have been very injudicious: but for their having sent out the troops, milord and his daughter might by this time have been on board their yacht again. As it is, there is no knowing when that may be—if ever." And at these last two words, which were uttered very sternly, that ugly look came over the brigand's face, which seemed to reveal the character of the man behind it.

"Where is milord, as you persist so wrongfully in calling him?"

"You shall see him in a few moments. I have sent for you here, indeed, for that purpose. Look, sir; what you have told me of yourself and your slender purse, may be true or not." Walter was about to speak, but the other stopped him with a gesture. "Let us suppose it true, then; it is my rule that can not be the same as will not; and when the ransom is not forthcoming, I kill the captive. Your life is therefore forfeit. I might say much more than your life, but I do not wish to proceed to extremities with you even in the way of menace. You may save your skin, without the loss of a ducat, if you will only be guided by good sense."

Walter bowed his head. "What is it you require of me, Captain Corrali?"

"I want you to teach reason to this fellow-countryman of yours, whom I have in my power."

"And his daughter, where is his daughter?"

"She is safe enough. No harm will happen to her, from us, at all events."

"That means that she is dying," answered Walter hoarsely. "If the damp and cold should kill her, you are none the less her murderer than if you had slain her with your hands."

"I will settle with my own conscience for that, signor," returned the other contemptuously. "What we are both concerned about at present—and you much more than I, believe me—is this ransom. The old man is a fool, and can be made to understand nothing. He does not comprehend that I shall burn

him alive, skin him alive ; he thinks he is in London, and has to deal with a mere pickpocket. I protest that he offered me one thousand ducats—not a week's living for the band. It made my fingers itch to shoot him down ; only, that that would have been letting him off too cheaply."

So furious was the brigand's passion, that the foam flew from his lips, his eyes glared like those of a wild beast, and his fingers roved from knife-handle to pistol-butt as though they had been the keys of a piano.

"What is it exactly you wish me to do?" inquired Walter.

"To convince him that I mean what I say, that what I threaten I will perform ; and, worse, that if this money I demand is not forthcoming—all of it—that he shall die, and be days in dying ; that he shall pray for death a thousand times, and in vain."

"And what am I to gain, if I am successful in persuading him, Captain Corrali?"

"Life, liberty ! His ransom shall cover yours, which is but a flea-bite. If you fail, beware, young man, for you shall share his fate. Now, follow me." With these words, delivered in a most menacing tone, Corrali turned upon his heel, and led the way to a large beech tree, the branches of which swept the ground, and, moving them aside, revealed to Walter's eyes the recumbent form of Mr. Christopher Brown, wrapped in a capote, and pillowed on one of the cushions stolen from the cabin of his yacht.

The old merchant had not been sleeping ; anxiety and discomfort had banished slumber from him ; but, as he rose upon his elbow to regard his visitors, he rubbed his eyes, like some newly awakened man, who doubts whether he is not still in the land of dreams.

"Why, that's not Mr. Litton, surely?"

His tone had no displeasure in it, such as Walter had apprehended ; the danger and strangeness of his position forbade his entertaining the idea which might naturally have occurred to him under ordinary circumstances ; he did not recognise in Walter the man whom he had dismissed from his own house for deceit, whom he suspected of plotting to win his daughter, and whose presence in Sicily at the present moment he might well associate with the pursuit of the same forbidden object ;

he only beheld a friend and fellow countryman, dropped out of the clouds, and, as he vaguely hoped, with power to succour him.

"Why, who would have thought of meeting you in this den of thieves!" continued Mr. Brown. "Do you bring any good news!"

"Indeed, sir, no," answered Walter sorrowfully; "I am only this man's prisoner, like yourself."

"Yes, yes; all mice in my trap," put in Corrali, understanding by Walter's manner what was meant, and gesticulating triumphantly with his fingers. "Two were caught first, click, click! and then this one came to look after them, click!"

"What does the wretch say?" inquired Mr. Brown.

"He is telling you how it happens that I am here. I had discovered you were captured, and on my road to give the alarm, I got taken prisoner myself."

"I am sorry that we have done you such a wrong," said the merchant with feeling.

"I shall not regret it, Mr. Brown, if only I may be the means of being of advantage to you," answered Walter. "At present, our position is very serious. The troops have been called out, which has enraged the brigands, and——"

"But surely, then, we are certain of rescue?" interrupted the merchant eagerly. "The soldiers must needs make short work of such scoundrels as these."

"If they could only catch them; but that is not so easy. And if they did so, they would not find us alive. It is this man's invariable custom to kill his captives, if he cannot keep them."

"That is what he has been trying to persuade me all along," said Mr. Brown; "but I am not going to believe such nonsense. We are British subjects, and the thing is incredible, Mr. Litton. I would have dared him to do his worst, had it not been for dear Lilian." Here the old man's lip began to quiver, and a tear stole down his white cheek. "She was weak and ailing, when they took her, and though I have reason to believe she is better lodged than I have been, and attended by persons of her own sex, I tremble for what may be the effects of such rude treatment. O, Mr. Litton, what an ass and idiot I was, to listen to Sir Reginald's advice, and leave old England for

such a country as this ! How long do you think it will be before we get out of it ?”

“It is impossible, my dear sir, to guess at that. What I would implore you to persuade yourself is, that your position is a matter of life and death, in which no sacrifice can be considered too great a one. I am instructed by this man to treat with you concerning your ransom.”

“Yes, yes,” cried Corrali, pricking up his ears at the familiar “word ;” “now, you are coming to it at last. It is well you should make milord come to reason.”

“What I would advise, Mr. Brown,” said Walter, “is, that you should be firm on one point, namely, to pay nothing whatever until your daughter is placed in safety with her sister.”

“How much does he say ?” exclaimed Corrali impatiently. “I should like to hear him come to the point. Will he pay me my six hundred thousand ducats ?”

“You must be mad, Captain Corrali,” exclaimed Walter, in amazement. “There is no man alive, unless you caught your king himself, who could pay such a sum as that.”

“You mean no Sicilian ; but there are plenty Inglese. They are made of gold ; I know it. Nothing is good enough for them, and nothing too dear. A man who has a pleasure ship of his own, too ! My demands are too moderate : if anything is amiss with them, that is it. You tell him what I say. Six hundred thousand ducats, or he is a dead man.”

“This man says, Mr. Brown, that you must pay him a hundred thousand pounds, or he will kill you.”

The old merchant started to his feet so quickly, that Corrali drew back a pace, and laid his hand upon his knife. “A hundred thousand grandmothers ! Did any one ever hear of such a sum except in the Bank cellars ! If you were to sell me up to-morrow, I could not command the half of it. I will not give him a hundred thousand pence.”

“Ay, the bank,” put in Corrali cunningly, again recognising a scrap of what was said ; “now, that is like coming to business. He is talking of Gordon’s bank at Palermo, is he not ? That is, of course, where the money will come from.”

“Indeed, he is talking of nothing of the kind,” said Walter calmly. The excitement of the merchant, which had certainly testified to the extravagance of the demand as strongly as any

words could have done, had not, as he fancied, been thrown away upon the brigand chief. "He was saying that no private person, even in England, could command such a sum as you propose. He has not got it to give, nor yet the half of it."

"Then, by Santa Rosalia, he shall die!" cried the brigand, "and you along with him."

"It may be so, Captain Corrali, for it lies within your power to kill us——"

"Ay, and to do more, look you—to roast you, to skin you!"

"Just so; you mentioned all that before. It is in your power to do anything to us that you are wicked enough to imagine; but it is not in this man's power to pay the sum you propose. We shall die sooner or later, at all events—then you will be left, as you say, with our skins—they will not be worth much, and, in the end, you will be taken, and hanged for it. If you consider such a course of conduct advantageous, you must pursue it. For my part, if I were in your place, I would be a little more reasonable."

The brigand's face was black with rage; he looked more like a vulture than a human being, as he gazed on the unhappy merchant, as though longing to fall on him with beak and claw.

"You do not know me, Signor Inglese, or you would not dare to speak to me thus," said he to Walter. "Are we lawyer and client that you give me advice of this sort, and cross my will when I have expressed it?"

"I would not cross it, if I could help it, Captain Corrali; but your demands are those of a madman, of a man who wishes to have our blood, by demanding of us an impossibility."

"It is possible that you may be speaking the truth," answered Corrali after a long pause, "If this man has really but three hundred thousand ducats, with that I must be content. But if he does not possess *them*, then let him prepare for death, since, for a less sum, he shall never escape alive out of my hands. And let him come to his conclusion, 'Yea' or 'Nay,' within ten minutes, for my patience has reached its limit." As he said these words, the brigand produced one of the various watches that adorned his person—a gold one, incrustated with jewels, the spoil, probably, of some native milord—

and placed it on the ground before him, where it formed a spot of sunshine in that shady place.

Walter translated this ultimatum to the old merchant, and added an expression of his own belief that nothing less than the sum now named would suffice the brigand's greed.

"Fifty thousand pounds!" cried the old man in agony. "Why, that will be ruin, Mr. Litton—beggary!"

Walter did not believe that this was literally true. It was possible that such a sum was as great as even the merchant's credit could have realized in ready money, so far from home; but it could surely not be his whole fortune; and in his heart he wondered how, for an instant, considering the position of Lilian, her father should have hesitated to give in to terms that, however hard, were yet practicable. He did not know how dear is wealth to those who have much of it, especially when it has been acquired by their own hands; how one's ducats and one's daughter, if not rated at the same value, bear yet some proportion to one another, in such a man's mind, as they had in that of the Jew of Venice. Moreover, he did not take into sufficient account the natural incapacity of the owner of Willowbank, Regent's Park, to believe in the menaces of their captor. Mr. Christopher Brown had, probably, never read M. About's *King of the Mountains*, nor that matchless tale of M. Dumas, wherein he describes how the banker in the hands of brigands is charged a hundred thousand francs for an egg not particularly fresh, and at a similar rate for all other necessities of the table, till his bill for board equals the ransom he has declined to pay; and if he had read them, he would have taken them for romances, as void of foundation as a fairy tale. He was scarcely, in fact, more capable of realizing his present circumstances, than he would have been of imagining them, if they had not occurred. And though he saw himself fallen among thieves, and wholly in their power, he found it hard to believe that they would venture on such extremities as Walter had foreshadowed. The London cry, "Where are the police?" was a sentiment that he could not eradicate from his mind. In this matter, the brigand chief (who had, doubtless, had the opportunity of observing such workings of the mind in others of his captives), had gauged the merchant with considerable accuracy.

"No," persisted Mr. Brown; "let the scoundrel do his worst; his sickle shall never reap all the harvest of my life of honest toil. I will die rather than submit to it!"

"Alas, sir, it is not a question of dying, if what we have heard of this man's cruelties is true," urged Walter, "but of far worse than death; and, moreover, it is not your life nor mine that is at stake. Consider what your daughter must be enduring, and how every moment of delay and haggling may be fraught with peril to her."

"Consider!" echoed the merchant with irritation. "Do you suppose, then, that she has escaped my consideration? I am only thinking whether she would thank me for saving her, since it must needs be done at such a sacrifice to her of wealth, position, comfort, and all that makes life worth having. Three hundred thousand ducats! It is monstrous, it is incredible! Two thousand pounds a year for ever, in return for two nights' involuntary lodging upon a mountain-side. I will never give it!"

The very force and passion of these protestations, however, suggested to Walter that the merchant was at least wavering in his stubborn resolve.

"The question is, Mr. Brown," observed he, with earnestness, "is it within your power to command so vast a sum, or not?"

"I have a good name on Change, sir!" answered the other, with an assumption of dignity that at any other time would have been amusing to note; "and a good name there is good everywhere else."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, use it!" exclaimed Walter passionately. "Why, if you died, sir, under this man's tortures, and Lilian died"—for, in the stress and strain of their common misfortune, he spoke of her thus familiarly, and her father listened without reproof—"what would Lady Selwyn say? Would she thank you because your obstinate resolve had enriched her by the sacrifice of a father and a sister?"

"True, true," answered the old man, as if talking to himself: "all would in that case go to Lotty, which would mean to *him*."

By chance, Walter had hit upon an argument more convincing than any which logic or common sense could have suggested.

"Well, well, Mr. Litton, it is a hard case ; but I will be guided by you."

"The ten minutes are over," observed the brigand, taking up his watch, and throwing away the end of the cigar with which he had been beguiling the time. "Has milord come to his right mind ?"

"Mr. Brown will pay the money, Captain Corrali—that is, if so huge a sum can be raised in Palermo upon his credit—on one condition. His daughter must be set at liberty on the spot ; indeed, the letter of authorisation must be delivered to the banker by her hand. It would otherwise be valueless, since he would conclude it to have been extorted by force."

"That shall be done," answered the brigand quietly ; "we have no wish to retain the signora. It is a pleasure to me, I assure you, to reflect that we are to remain good friends. The sooner she is away, doubtless the better for her. Here are pens, ink, and paper, for the authorisation ;" and once more the chief produced from an outside pocket these business materials, which were almost as much the implements of his trade as the knife and the musket.

"My friend must see his daughter before she goes," observed Walter quickly. There was something in the brigand's manner that had aroused his suspicions. Was it not possible that that phrase, "The sooner she is away, doubtless the better for her," implied that she was dying ?

"That is impossible," answered Corrali coolly, "since milord does not speak Sicilian. No word is allowed to pass between a prisoner about to be released and one who is still retained captive, unless in our own language. The signora will take the authorisation—which will be read by a friend of ours who is acquainted with the English tongue—but we must take care that she has no secret instructions. I regret to forbid an interview so naturally agreeable, but the precaution is one which will recommend itself to milord's good sense."

The Tartar, which had been so visible when Captain Corrali's skin had been scratched, was no longer visible ; the wound was healed ; he was once more, in manner, the Chesterfield of brigand chiefs.

"But for all we know, the signora may be"—Walter hesitated ; he could not bring himself to speak of Death in connec-

tion with his Lilian—"unfit for travel, too ill to bear the journey ; or, under that pretence, you may not let her free, after you have promised to do so."

"The signor should remember, that without her personal presence at the banker's, as he has just observed, the ransom could not be obtained," answered Corrali blandly. "If the assurance of her being alive is all that is required, the signor can see her himself—since you both speak our language—but not milord."

When this was communicated to Mr. Brown, he did not make the opposition to this harsh announcement that Walter had expected ; the fact was, that though he loved his daughter with all the strength of a strong nature, he was singularly free from sentiment as such ; in this matter, as in professional affairs, he looked to the main facts, and provided that he could feel assured that Lilian was safe in her friends' hands, he could forego that parting caress which to some men would have been worth the ransom he was about to pay. Moreover, it must be added, that he conceived that all difficulties in the way of his own freedom would be at once removed, and that the next day, or the one after next at farthest, would see him once more on board the *Sylphide*, never to touch land again until they reached the British soil.

"Go and see her, Mr. Litton," said he. "Give her my fondest love, and tell her how it is that I am debarred from bidding her good-bye. Bid her hasten matters with the bankers all she can. Since I must pay this money, the sooner it is done the better ; and if you can do so, without being overheard, tell her that large as the sum is which has been extorted from me, she will not, nevertheless, have to beg her bread—do you understand ?"

Walter understood very well, though he wondered greatly how Mr. Brown could comfort himself with such reflections at such a time, much more recommend them to others.

Then the merchant drew out the authorisation—he had become quite himself again at the prospect of a business transaction—in brief and concise terms. It was unnecessary to dilate upon his necessitous position, since all the world of Palermo was by this time acquainted with it ; but he was careful, at the chief's suggestion, to add, beside the usual formula, that all the

ransom must be paid in gold. His name was well known to the bankers, to whom he had been duly recommended ; and there was his son-in-law, Sir Reginald, to vouch for him. The general sympathy of the commercial public and of his fellow-countrymen would doubtless also be of some advantage in such a crisis ; and, upon the whole, he did not doubt that the money—which in London he could have produced in a few hours—would be forthcoming in a day or two at the farthest. He did not comprehend—nor, indeed, did Walter—that the raising of the money was only one of the difficulties that might interpose between them and freedom.

"There !" said Mr. Brown, when he had signed the document, and the other two had witnessed it ; "I have chopped my arm off ; I feel better."

To sign away so huge a sum seemed, indeed, to him like the lopping away of a limb ; but when once it was gone, he wiped it off the books of his mind like a bad debt, and commenced the business of life again, under new conditions.

"And now, gentlemen," said Corralli, who had at once possessed himself of the document, "the sooner we get on with this little business the better for all parties. Santoro !"

At the sound of his name, Walter's body-guard at once made his appearance ; he had decked himself out even more splendidly than before, having been lent some personal ornaments by his friends to go a-wooing with ; just as a young lady will sometimes borrow a necklace or a bracelet for a ball from her mother's jewel-case.

"I see," said the captain, addressing his follower, with great good-humour, "that you have made up your mind to see Lavocca, and, as it happens, the opportunity now offers itself. The signor here is to be conducted to the cavern."

"The cavern !" exclaimed Santoro, as though he could hardly believe his ears.

"Yes ; did I not say so ? Colletta and yourself will be answerable, as before, for his safety, and he will be intrusted to you two alone. If you have any last words for milord," added he, addressing Walter, "you had better say them."

"Mr. Brown," said Walter, "I am going. Have you anything to add to what you have already said, as respects your daughter ?"

"Nothing, but my love and blessing, Mr. Litton. But, as respects yourself, I would wish to say, in case anything should happen to either of us ere we meet again, that I am deeply sensible of the good-will towards me and mine, which has caused you to share our misfortune. I confess that I behaved ill to you at Willowbank, and that my first impression of your character was the true one." Walter's only answer was to hold out his hand, which the other took and pressed warmly. "You will tell me the truth about my Lilian," faltered the old man; "you will conceal nothing from me. It's uncommon hard, because a man only speaks his mother-tongue, that he mayn't say good-bye to his daughter. But, after all, it will be only for a few days, will it? We shall be on board the yacht again before the week's out, eh?"

"Indeed, sir, I hope you will," said Walter earnestly; but since it was Thursday even then, he doubted it.

"If Lilian gets to Palermo this afternoon, you see," argued Mr. Brown, "the mosey can be collected before night, and sent up here the first thing in the morning. I assure you it is not so pleasant sleeping under these beech-trees, that I should wish to try it a third time. At all events, I do trust the people at Gordon's will take care that we don't spend our Sunday in such society as this," and he pointed to the members of the band, who, with characteristic interest in any excitement, had already gathered round to see Walter and his guards depart upon their expedition. The picture of the honest merchant, as he stood without his leafy tent bidding adieu to him in such sanguine words, and denouncing the unconscious spectators, was fated often to recur to Walter's mind, in days to come, with a sad sense of contrast.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE CAVERN.

WHEN Walter left the camp with his two companions, the sun was high in the heavens, and poured down its rays upon a magnificent landscape of wood and mountain, but one which was without a trace of cultivation ; not a road was visible in any direction, nor did they come across any pathway, save such as the goats frequented, and which was used by the sure-footed brigands with equal facility. Lofty as was their position, their route still lay upwards, and the summit of the mountain was still hid from their view to the east and north, in which latter quarter, as Walter supposed, lay the sea. He cast his keen eyes hither and thither in hopes of a landmark, and presently, upon his right, rose Etna, its crown of snow shining in the morning light, as though it were one jewel. Colletta, who was walking behind him, marked the quick direction of his glance, and called out to his companion, who instantly stopped, and produced from his pocket a long shawl. He had a dozen pockets, at least, in various parts of his clothing ; some for his jewellery, some for his food, some for his ammunition ; while the flaps of his shooting-jacket, more voluminous than those of an English poacher, could easily have held, not only a hare, but a goat. Santoro's manner was so stern, and even truculent, upon exhibiting this unlooked-for commodity, that for an instant Walter imagined that he was about to be strangled *à la Turk*, with a shawl instead of a bowstring, and he drew back a pace mechanically.

"It is useless to make resistance," said Santoro coldly. "We have our orders, and must obey them ; it is necessary that the signor should be blindfolded."

"Blindfolded !" echoed Walter ; the thought of being shot with his eyes bandaged, suggested by what he had read of military executions, at once occurring to his mind. "No ; you may shoot as I am, and be hanged to you." This was an illogical

speech, since, if the brigands had intended to take his life with out his seeing them, it was obvious they might have done it fifty times over, by simply shooting him from behind ; but then the conditions were not favourable for pure logic.

"We mean you no harm, signor," explained Santoro ; "but the captain does not choose that you should know the way to our cavern up yonder ;" and he pointed eastward with his finger.

"But it isn't in Mount Etna, is it ?" inquired Walter, smiling, "or I shall have to walk a long way with my eyes shut."

"That hill yonder is not Etna, signor," returned the brigand calmly ; and then, with his companion's assistance, he proceeded to bind the shawl twice and thrice over the upper part of their prisoner's face, like a turban which has slipped a few inches down. Walter knew that the brigand had lied to him concerning Etna, and made up his mind to detect, if possible, the direction in which they were about to proceed. But this was at once rendered impossible by the simple precaution which children use in blindman's-buff. They turned him round and around three times ; then each taking an arm, they led him away, at first down hill, probably retracing their steps, to confuse him, and then again up hill, till the fatigue and heat incident upon his constrained motion and bandaged head became almost insupportable. At last, they came to what appeared to be high level ground with trees, to judge by the coolness and the breeze upon it, and here they halted. Then the brigand call was given, and returned, as it seemed, from close at hand ; a few minutes of waiting, during which he heard a grinding noise, as of stone on stone, and then he was bidden to stoop his head, and follow Santoro, who guided him by his hand. Half-a-dozen paces of cautious walking, during which his disengaged fingers were bruised against what seemed a rocky passage ; the grinding noise was heard again, and then a wave of cool salt air broke gratefully upon his mouth and cheek. Santoro had let go his hand, so that he dared not move, since, for aught he knew, he was at the summit of some dizzy precipice ; but if his sense of hearing could be trusted, there was a woman's cry of welcome, and then kisses. These lasted for a considerable interval, during which he stood with bowed head and blinded eyes, doubtless in a very ridiculous position ; then a

woman's smothered laugh broke tinkling out, and Santoro cried :
 " A thousand pardons, signor ; I had quite forgotten that you
 were still stooping : you can now hold up your head."

" But can I take off the bandage ?"

" In one moment, signor ;" but there was more kissing, and
 a whispered word or two, and a sound like a slapped cheek,
 before the shawl was loosened and he was permitted to look
 about him.

The scene that saluted Walter's dazzled eyes was very sur-
 prising. He found himself in a vast cavern, the arch of which,
 so far from endangering his head, was fifty feet above it ; huge
 stalactites, on which the sunbeams shone, and gave to them the
 brightness of lit chandeliers, depended from the roof ; while
 the sides of the cave, notwithstanding it was dry and warm,
 were lined with luxuriant creepers. The floor, a sparkling sand,
 which would have competed with salt for whiteness, was soft
 and noiseless to the feet as thick-piled carpet. Of windows
 this noble chamber could not boast ; but through a vast natural
 opening—by which the light and air were at present freely
 admitted, but could be excluded at will by a mat-curtain—the
 blue sea could be seen far as eye could reach. The sight of it
 was almost like liberty itself to Walter, and for an instant his
 gaze rested on it with thankful joy, to the neglect of other
 objects ; then it lit on a young lad, more smartly dressed than
 any of his late companions on the mountain, but the knife and
 pistol in whose belt proclaimed him to follow the same lawless
 trade ; he leant against the opposite wall, with his eyes fixed
 on the sand, and was apparently unconscious of a stranger's
 presence.

" Why, where is Santoro gone," inquired Walter, " and—
 and—the lady ?"

" Santoro will return in a moment, signor," murmured the
 lad. The soft gentle voice struck Walter as familiar, but it
 was the tell-tale blush upon the cheek, and the shy glance of
 the eye, which disclosed to him that he was addressing a
 female.

" Oh, I see," cried he with some awkwardness ; " you are
 Lavocca."

" Yes, signor." He wondered now how, despite her brigand
 attire, he could have ever taken her for a boy, so feminine were

her looks and tone. It was evident that the mention of her name had revealed to her that he was acquainted with Santoro's love for her, and that the knowledge overwhelmed her with confusion. She stood swaying her foot upon the sand, and playing with the pistol in her dainty sash, as though it had been a flower which she would have picked to pieces. For a Sicilian, she was almost a blonde, and a very pretty one; her hair curled in profusion about her ears and temples, but descended no lower, forbidden, doubtless, to do so by the brigand code; her mouth, though weak in its expression, was a very charming one, and no man who desired to be her husband would probably have wished it stronger.

"But what on earth has become of Santoro?" repeated Walter with curiosity. "His fingers untied this shawl but one minute ago, and now he has vanished——"

"He is here," said Lavocca, interrupting, "and the young signora with him."

"The signora!" cried Walter, turning eagerly round, and expecting to behold no other than Lilian herself.

"That is the name by which my people honour me," said a grave sweet voice; "but I am plain Joanna, sister of Rocco Corrali, at your service."

The speaker was a tall and strikingly handsome girl—so tall, that even in her male costume her height did not appear insignificant. Her hair, which was quite short and straight, except for a tiny curl at each ear, which had a charming effect, was black and glossy as a crow's wing; her eyes were also black as blackest coal, and though mild and maidenly in their present expression, could, perhaps, like coal, give forth flame upon occasion; while her complexion, which had once, doubtless, been olive, like that of the majority of her fellow-country-women, had become, by exposure to the sun and wind, of a deep walnut. In woman's clothes, she probably would have looked coarse; but in her jacket, braided with silver buttons, and tied at the waist with a rich scarlet scarf, her full trousers of blue cloth, and small though thick-soled boots, she was as betwitching a figure as ever stepped before the footlights.

It was not in the young painter's nature to have refused admiration to so picturesque an object, and besides, he reflected that Lilian was in this woman's power, and that it behoved him

to conciliate her by all the arts he knew. I am afraid, therefore, that he affected to be even more struck by this lady's appearance than he really was, and allowed a certain respectful homage to be perceived in his looks and tone as he addressed her, which were not wholly genuine.

"I am come, signora, from your brother, with a message to the young lady under your protection, as Santoro here" (for the brigand had returned with Joanna) "has doubtless informed you."

"Is she a relative of yours?" inquired Joanna in a careless tone, but with a certain quickness of manner that did not escape Walter's notice. He was no coxcomb, but if his appearance had made a favourable impression upon this Amazon, it was his interest—and that of another—to improve it.

"No, signora."

"Oh, indeed. Then, may I ask how it happens that you have been sent hither instead of her father?"

"Well, for one thing, Mr. Brown could only speak English; and it seems that it is contrary to your custom to allow a prisoner who is about to leave you——"

"How do you know she is about to leave us? I mean, how did my brother know?" interrupted Joanna haughtily. "The lady is in my hands, not his."

"I know nothing of that, signora," answered Walter deferentially, "being, alas, but a captive myself. I am only your brother's mouth-piece. A very large sum has been agreed upon as our ransom, and that cannot be procured unless the young lady applies to the banker in person. I understood, too, that she was far from well, and to an invalid—however admirably such quarters may agree, as one can see they do, with one like yourself, in health—these open-air lodgings must needs be hurtful."

"The young lady is well lodged enough, as you shall presently see for yourself," answered Joanna: "the air that is here admitted so freely"—and she stepped towards the orifice of the cave, while Lavocca gave place to her, and stole to where Santoro was standing, at the other end of the apartment—"is shut out from our inner-room. And what was the other reason which you were about to say brought you here?" continued Joanna, dropping her voice, so that Walter alone could hear

her. Was it curiosity to behold, before you returned to your friends, a woman outlawed and unsexed ; the companion, and even the leader of outlaws ; one who, while still a girl in years, had forgotten not only how to love, but how to pity ?" The words were spoken with bitterness, but the look that accompanied the words was far from bitter ; it was remonstrant, and almost pleading.

" Indeed, signora, you misjudge me : it was no mere curiosity that brought me here ; and if it had been so, I should have expected to see no such being as you describe, for I have heard no such account of her."

" Then what sort of person did you expect to see ?"

" A young girl, whom the tyranny of circumstances had driven to a mode of life that is indeed to be deplored, but who, while embracing it, has given proofs of kindness and generosity, which would have adorned a far more enviable position."

" Your informant," answered Joanna, sighing, but evidently greatly pleased, " must, I am afraid, have been Santoro yonder, who has his special reasons, as we see, for currying favour with the mistress of Lavocca."

" He could not have known that I should quote him, signora, since I heard his account of you long before my coming here was arranged. I am well convinced, since the face is the index of the mind, that his praise was well deserved."

" Ah, signor, you have not seen me in one of my passions," said Joanna naively. " We Sicilians are not like your English misses—so quiet, so gentle, like this one in yonder room. But I perceive you are impatient to see her. Come with me, sir."

Joanna's voice had suddenly altered ; her tones, which had been almost tender, became cold and stern. Her very figure had changed ; for, whereas she had been leaning against the curtain, and partly hidden in the shadow of it, in an attitude of graceful ease, she now drew herself up, like a soldier on parade, and led the way across the cavern with quick determined tread.

Close behind where Santoro and Lavocca were now standing in earnest but low-toned talk, and where Walter himself had stood, till, at a sign from Joanna, he had changed his place, was a sort of recess in the wall of the cave : it was dark, and apparently of small extent, but, at the touch of Walter's companion, what seemed to be rock, but was, in fact, a door, rudely

painted in imitation of it, opened without noise, and revealed a second apartment, smaller than the first, but furnished like an ordinary room. There were chairs and a table in it; a thick carpet covered the floor; instead of plants and ferns, the walls were hung with the same kind of matting of which the curtain in the outer cave had been composed. It was lighted, like its fellow, by an orifice that looked seaward, but to west instead of north, and which could be closed at pleasure by a wooden shutter. Close beside it, and yet sheltered by the draught, was a rude couch, covered with rugs and cushions, upon which lay a female form.

"The young lady is asleep," said Joanna softly.

Walter's limbs trembled beneath him, as he bent down to gaze upon the unhappy Lilian. Her eyes were closed, but there were traces of tears upon her pale cheek, in the centre of which there burned a hectic spot of fever; he could hardly recognise her for even the invalid he had seen carried up and down the Marina. "Great heaven, how ill she looks!" was his smothered ejaculation.

"She has suffered from alarm and fatigue," observed Joanna coldly; "she has been distressed, too, about the safety of her friends. It will doubtless do her good to see you."

"Would you be kind enough to break it to her that I am here?" said Walter, stepping back a pace. "She is not aware that I have been taken captive, nor even of my presence in Sicily. The sudden shock might do her harm."

"One is not killed by unexpected happiness," returned Joanna, "or at least so I have been told by those who have experienced it; but, nevertheless, I will do your bidding. Who shall I say has come? You are not a relative, it seems. Shall I say that it is her betrothed?"

"I am not her betrothed," answered Walter, gravely.

"But you hope to be so," returned the other quickly. "I read it in your face."

"Indeed I have no hope of the sort, signora," was Walter's calm reply. He did not feel it necessary to explain to her why he had none; but he had spoken the literal truth. Not only was the difference of their fortunes as insurmountable as heretofore (for he was well convinced that Mr. Brown could pay his ransom and yet remain a wealthy man), but there was that in

Lilian's look which foreshadowed to him that she would live to be the bride of no man. "I am her friend, and her father's friend, and that is all. My name is Walter Litton."

Joanna approached the couch, and placed her hand softly upon Lilian's own. She awoke at once with a start.

"Is papa here?" cried she excitedly.

"Your father is not here, but a friend has come to see you."

"A friend? Alas! I have no friend except my father."

"He calls himself so, at all events; he has brought some news for you, but you must not talk of it in English, else you cannot see him."

"In English! Is he, then, an Englishman?"

"Yes; his name is Walter Litton."

"Walter!" A low weak cry, in which surprise and tenderness were strangely mingled, escaped her pale lips.

"I am here, Lilian," said Walter coming forward and holding out his hand. "Do not excite yourself; I bring you good tidings."

"But how came you here?" She retained his hand in hers, but closed her eyes after one glance of grateful recognition.

"It is a long story, which there is no time to tell you now. Let it suffice that I have been taken captive with your father."

"Ah, you risked, then, your life for mine." These words came from the heart, and, like the rest, were spoken in her native tongue.

"You must not speak English," broke in Joanna.

"Pardon her, signora; it will not occur again," said Walter. "She fears that her father's life is menaced. No, Lilian; he will regain his liberty, if only the ransom which he has agreed to give can be procured. The authorisation for its payment, which you will present at Gordon's bank, is here"—he placed it in her hand. "When once the money has been received, he will be free."

"And you?" In those two words were expressed all the tenderest emotions of which a woman's heart is capable. Walter felt that she was aware at once of all that he had believed, contrived, and endured for her sake, from the moment of their last parting.

"I shall be free also in a day or two, at furthest; when we shall be sent back in safety to Palermo. Our only anxiety is,

indeed, upon your account. Do not fret yourself as respects us. It is the thought of your condition—the trials, the hardships to which you have been exposed—that wrings your father's heart. Do you feel that you have strength enough to return to the city, where your sister's loving tendance awaits you?—Signora"—here he turned to Joanna—"you said something a while ago of this poor lady being your prisoner, to be dealt with according to your own good pleasure; but I am well convinced that you will not refuse your brother's wish that she should be set free at once. You see how weak and ill she is. To keep her here, would be to kill her."

"And what then?" whispered Joanna in his ear.

"Why, then, I should say, that what some folks have said of you (as you told me) was only too true; that you were a woman unsexed, and without a heart."

"You would be wrong," answered she, in the same low tones, but without the harshness that had accompanied her previous words. "Even if I acted as you suggest, I should have a justification. This girl is nothing to me, nay, perhaps worse than nothing. Still, for your sake," here her voice became low and soft, "all shall be as you wish; she shall be carried to Palermo this very day."

"Lilian," cried Walter joyfully, "the signora has promised to set you free at once; before to-night you will be clasped in your sister's arms! Let that thought give you strength and courage."

"I will do my best, Walter," answered Lilian feebly; "but my brain seems on fire, and my limbs do not obey my will."

"You hear her, signora!" pleaded Walter passionately. "Oh do not let a minute be lost in sending her where aid can be given to her!"

Joanna bowed her head, and glided from the room.

"I shall never see you more, Walter," whispered Lilian.

"Yes, dearest, yes, you will," answered he, falling on his knees beside her; "we shall meet again, and you will once more be well and happy. Hush! she is returning."

At that moment, Joanna entered, accompanied by Santoro and Lavocca. These two took up the couch, which was, indeed, but a litter upon trestles, and carried Lilian forth into the outer

room. Walter would have followed, but Joanna made a sign to him to remain.

"You must stay here, signor," said she authoritatively, "or you would learn the secret of finding your way out of prison."

"I have no desire to learn it," answered he, truly enough, since his escape at such a time would probably have endangered the merchant's life.

"Ah, you are smooth of speech, Signor Inglese, but I mistrust such gallantry. You have deceived me once already."

"Not willingly, signora ; nor am I conscious of having done so."

"What ! not when you told me that you were not betrothed to that young girl, but only her father's friend ! Is it usual, then, in your country for such 'friends' to take leave of one another with kisses ?"

"It is allowable," answered Walter with solemnity, "when we believe that we shall never see one another on earth again."

"To be sure, that makes a difference," observed Joanna thoughtfully. "And I certainly agree with you that it is not probable that the young lady will be long lived."

To this Walter answered nothing, for, indeed, to him it had seemed as though Lilian's motionless and almost inanimate form had been carried out but to be placed in a still narrower prison-house. He drew a chair to the table, and placing his elbows upon it, covered his face with his hands.


"You would be left alone with your grief, Signor Litton ?" said Joanna interrogatively, and laying her hand upon the door.

"Thank you, yes," answered he, scarcely knowing what he said.

"Those are his first thanks," observed she bitterly, as she left the room ; "thanks for my absence." But if Walter heard her words, he did not heed them ; he was picturing to himself the English burial-ground at Palermo, as he had seen it a few days ago, and wondering in what part of its beautiful garden-ground they would lay his Lilian.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JOANNA.

“OME, signor, you must eat,” were the first words spoken, in kind and cheerful tones, that roused Walter from the stupor of sorrow into which Lilian’s departure under such sad conditions had cast him. Joanna was standing by him, with a loaf of bread in one hand, and a bottle of wine in the other; she placed these upon the table, and then produced from a cupboard some cold kid and a pot of cream. This solicitude for his comfort did not fail to move the young fellow towards her. The hearts of all his sex are approachable through the palate, and in this case, Walter had every excuse for giving way to human weakness, for he was exceedingly hungry; moreover, he was not so imprudent as not to perceive the immense importance of making friends with the sister of the brigand chief, so he fell to on the viands with honest vigour.

“Have they starved you up in the mountains yonder?” inquired she, watching him with pleased surprise.

“They have not treated me so well as you do, signora.” Allow me to congratulate you upon the contents of your cellar. Why, this is more like a liqueur than a wine!”

“It is *lacrymæ Christi*. The mayor of the village hereabouts is good enough to send us some at Easter-tide.”

“To send us some,” thought Walter, and he felt as the Black Knight might have done had he been more?—when the friar of Copmanhurst described how he got his venison.

“Do not imagine it is stolen,” laughed Joanna, reading his thoughts; “we brigands are not the outlaws that you are inclined to imagine us. We have friends in higher places than you imagine; and as for the poor—when did you ever hear us spoken ill of by a poor man?”

Walter thought of his host on the Marina, confined to a few square miles of ground for life, because of Captain Corrali and Company, but he remained silent.

"I see you are determined to think ill of us," said Joanna plaintively.

"I think ill of the trade, signora, I confess. See what it has done in my case."

"Your 'friend,' the young lady, was ailing before she fell into our hands," put in his companion quickly.

"I was not referring to her, signora, but to myself. Here am I—without any fault of my own, unless the being on a high road at midnight is a fault—taken prisoner, and put in danger of my life——"

"I hope not : indeed, I could not smile if I thought it probable," interrupted Joanna. "You will pay some money, the loss of which you will not feel, and will then be sent back again to your friends. Your few days of captivity will be an experience with which to entertain them, and amongst other things you will have to tell them, is the account of how you met a horrid female creature in men's clothes, who lived in a cavern, and had no heart."

"Indeed, Joanna" (he had unconsciously dropped the "signora,") "I shall always speak of that incident in quite another way. It is no flattery to you to say that the only pleasant thing that has happened to me during my captivity has been my reception here ; your abode and surroundings are a romance in themselves, the interest of which will not easily wear away ; your unlooked-for kindness and hospitality I shall never forget ; the only thing which distresses me about it is, that you, seeing what you might be, should be what you are."

"I don't understand you, signor," cried Joanna, her dark eyes glowing with sudden fire.

"Nay, I meant no offence ; but to me it appears deplorable that one so fitted to adorn an honest home, beautiful enough for a princess, sound-hearted, generous——"

"That is because I let the signora go," observed Joanna, bitterly.

"No, indeed ; that only shewed you to be womanly. To have retained her would have been cruel, and cruelty is not your nature. I say that it seems to me that, in leading the life you do, you throw yourself away ; and in a little while, when the excitement of such a mode of existence begins to flag, you will bitterly repent your choice of it."

"I had no choice," said Joanna sullenly.

"You have it now, signora. When this unhappy business is over, you have only to come into Palermo, and I will answer for it that you have made a friend there who will provide for you a better future."

"And who is that friend?" inquired Joanna, with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"The young lady whom you have just set free: she has a grateful heart, and her father is a man of wealth."

"I do not wish to be indebted to that young lady," answered Joanna coldly. "I would rather be a brigand than a beggar, in any case; and never would I beg of her. Let us cease to talk of my affairs, signor; they may appear to interest you now, but they will not do so a week hence. The memory of all your sex is very short, but that of a rich man like you for a poor girl like me—bah! he only thinks of her while he sees her."

"You are making several mistakes at once, Joanna," said Walter gravely. "In the first place, I am as poor as you are, probably poorer. I should be totally unable to pay even the small sum your brother fixed upon as the price of my freedom, but that he has permitted Mr. Brown's ransom to cover mine."

"You are, however, the betrothed of this rich man's daughter."

"I again declare to you that such is not the fact; my poverty would, in any case, forbid such an alliance. I am but a penniless painter; this sketch-book is my cheque-book, and Nature the only bank from which I draw my income."

"Is this really true, sir?" asked Joanna, regarding him with a steady gaze.

"Do I look so false that it is impossible to believe my words?" returned Walter, smiling.

"O no; you look true enough; and you take no vows to the saints, which is also a good sign," answered Joanna naively; "but still I cannot believe you. An Englishman, and poor! That is incredible."

"And yet there are a good many of them in that condition, I do assure you," said Walter, smiling.

"Well, let me prove you. You say you are an artist—one who makes his living by his pencil; if it be so, draw *me*."

"With the greatest pleasure, signora."

"Do not fear that it will be lost time," continued she eagerly; "I have plenty of ducats."

"Nay, nay ; I will not take your portrait except for love—that is, for nothing."

"What! you call love nothing?"

"No, indeed ; that is only our English phrase. The light here, however, is not so good for drawing as in the other apartment. Let us go in there."

She led the way at once into the larger chamber, which was empty.

"Ah! this is kind of you," continued Walter. "You have allowed Lavocca to accompany your late captive on her journey."

"I thought it would please you that she should have a female escort as far as the next village," replied Joanna. "My four men are her bearers, so you have only to kill me to obtain your freedom."

"But, in the meantime, you have only to shoot me with one of your pistols."

"No, Signor Litton," answered his companion softly, "I have never shot any one yet, and your blood, of all men's, will certainly never stain my hands. You can kill me still, as far as my pistols are concerned," and, with a sudden impulse, she drew them from her girdle, and placed them on the ground at Walter's feet.

"But how would your death avail me?" argued he, smiling. "If I were to murder you—which Heaven forbid!—I should still be a prisoner, since I do not know the secret of how to leave this enchanted castle."

"To be sure ; I had forgotten that. You shall never say that I did not trust you. See here." She picked up a small crowbar that lay at her feet, and placed it in a crevice of the wall of rock ; at the touch of it, one of the huge stones of which it was composed turned noiselessly inwards, revealing a dark, low-roofed passage. "Stoop your head, signor, and follow me."

Walter obeyed her, and in a few steps found himself in another cave, having a small opening inland.

"Every one knows of this cavern," said Joanna quietly ; "but of the two inner ones no one knows, save half-a-dozen persons. If my brother found that I had disclosed them to you, he would shoot me without mercy. I have, therefore, placed my life in your hands ; and also your own liberty. And now," added she

with passionate energy, "that pathway through the wood leads to the high-road to Palermo. Take it, if it so please you, and leave me to my fate. Rocco will kill me, to be sure ; but you will be happy."

"Nay, Joanna ; in that case, I should certainly not be happy," answered Walter soothingly. "Nor do you think so ill of me as to believe it."

"Alas ! I do not think ill of you," sighed Joanna ; "and I wish you would think less ill of me." Her voice had sunk very low, and the words were almost inaudible to Walter, whom the fresh air, and the sense of the opportunity of freedom (though he had no idea of taking advantage of it), was filling with unwonted pleasure.

"And how far is it from hence to Palermo ?" inquired he thoughtfully.

"Not ten miles. You could reach it on foot within three hours ; nor would there be any chance of falling in with my brother's men upon the road."

Walter had not asked the question with any reference to himself, but with the view of hearing how soon Lilian might be expected to reach the city ; but he had the prudence to conceal this. "It is strange, Joanna," said he rebukefully, "that you, who have shewn such a generous confidence, should give no credit to others for even the commonest gratitude. Come, let us go within, lest those who are more jealous of your captive's safety than yourself should return and find him outside his cage."

As they retraced their steps, Joanna shewed him how the inner chambers of this subterranean home were reached. The exterior cavern had nothing remarkable about it, and, indeed, had at one time been used as a cow-house by the neighbouring shepherds. Any explorer would naturally have given his attention to its extremity, but it was immediately at the entrance, on the right-hand side, that the movable stone was situated ; this turned, as it were, upon a pivot, the natural mechanism of which had been assisted by art, and required from without nothing but a gentle pressure to set it in motion.

"You do not regret having confided to me this secret, Joanna ?" inquired Walter, as, pencil in hand, he watched her face, preparatory to transferring it to his sketch-book, and noticed how suddenly it had grown pale and grave.

"No ; I think not. I am certain you will not betray us. But, in my desire to shew I trusted you, I forgot that I was imperilling the safety of others as well as my own. To some men—poor, as you describe yourself to be—this knowledge would have been a great temptation, since it might any day produce them twelve thousand ducats."

"How so ?"

"Because that is the sum that is set upon my brother's head—and this cavern, when he is closely pursued, is his hiding-place."

"Well, I am not so poor as to take blood-money," answered Walter, smiling. "Your secret is as safe with me, Joanna, as though it had never been revealed ; there is my hand upon it."

She took it, carried it to her lips, and then retained it. It was an embarrassing position for any young gentleman, not enamoured of the lady, this demonstration ; and especially so, when he wanted the use of his fingers to take her portrait. Perhaps Walter would not have been so hard-hearted, had he not just parted from his Lilian, ill, perhaps dying, and whose last kiss was still lingering on his cheek ; but, as it was, he gently withdrew his hand, and commenced his picture.

Under other circumstances, it would have been a task very congenial to him ; for never had painter a sitter more picturesque than his present one. Joanna's charms, striking as they were at first sight, were, unlike those of dark beauties in general, even more attractive the longer the eye rested on them. Her black eyes, when in repose, as now, had a certain blueness in them, not cold, like that of the sloe, but warm and tender ; at the same time, her face wore a certain dignity, for which women are, in general, compelled to use haughtiness as the substitute. Her male attire, from long custom, was worn without awkwardness, and became her grandly ; and there were freedom and grace in every movement, when, at the artist's request, she changed the position of a limb. He had been drawing for only a few minutes, when suddenly the shrill moist note, with which Walter's ear had become familiar, was heard without ; and she instantly started to her feet. "Away, into the other room !" cried she.

Walter understood that this was lest he should appear to be

a witness to the opening of the secret door, and hastened to obey her. "Santoro and the others have returned, I suppose?"

"Hush! no," said she, pushing him quickly out; "it is Rocco."

Hardly had he time to gain the inner apartment, when the stone revolved upon its pivot, and Corralli sprang into the room Walter had just quitted.

The attire of the brigand chief was torn and stained with blood; his face scarlet with haste and anger, or both, and covered with perspiration.

"Where are the Englishman and the girl?" were his first impatient words.

"The Englishman is in yonder. The girl has been sent to Palermo, at your request, as Santoro informed me."

"Let her be followed and brought back at once."

"There is no one to do it; all the men went away with her, since she had to be carried on a litter. She is ill; and indeed, as I think, dying."

"No matter; she shall die with us, not with her friends. People will say else, that we gave her up through fear. The troops have fired upon us, as if that were the way to treat with me and mine. I will have her back, alive or dead. How long is it since she left you?"

"More than three hours," answered Joanna calmly.

It had not, in fact, been half that time, as Walter, whom not a word of this conversation escaped, though it was not all intelligible to him, was well aware.

"Il diavolo!" muttered the brigand, striking his heel into the sand of the cavern. "It will be the worse for those that are left. Where is this fellow?" Then he strode into the inner room, and confronted Walter.

"Look you," cried he passionately, "you think all is well with you because this old man's daughter has escaped from me. But you will find, unless she sends the money before the week is out, that all is not so well. There are some things that are sweeter than money. These soldiers of yours have done us a mischief; and somebody shall pay for it. Do you understand me?"

"Indeed, Captain Corralli, it is easy to understand that some-

thing has put you out of temper," answered Walter calmly. "But if the soldiers have attacked you, it is at least plain that neither Mr. Brown nor I could have sent them."

"They came on your account, however; and what has happened goes down to your account. Bind his eyes, Joanna."

"What is it you are about to do, Rocco?" inquired the girl with hesitation.

"To take him away with me at once, lest another bird should slip out of the cage."

"But he is surely safer here than anywhere," urged Joanna.

"Do as I bid you, or I will make him safe enough at once!" and the brigand touched one of the pistols in his belt. "Now, fasten his arms behind him."

"An impediment to your movements, brother."

"Tush! Do you suppose that I am going to give him a chance of tripping me over a precipice. He will go fast enough with my knife behind him, I'll warrant."

"What, are you going alone with him? Hark! there is the signal. Santoro and the rest will have returned."

"So much the better for this gentleman here," grunted the brigand, "since he will have his arms loose. Otherwise, I should have waited for none of them. I am not in a mood to be trifled with, Mr. Englishman. It will be a word and a pistol shot to-day with you, if you do not step out."

"Don't answer him," whispered Joanna in Walter's ear. "He has spilt blood to-day, and is dangerous."

The speech and manner of the captain were, indeed, like those of a madman. No sooner had those who had formed Lilian's escort entered the cavern, than they were ordered on the march, though two of them at least had done a good day's work in that way already. No other voice was heard save that of the furious chief; but as Walter, with blinded eyes, was quitting the cavern, he felt a parcel placed in the pocket of his shooting-coat, and the pressure of a soft hand, that seemed to bid him be of good courage.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HARD TIMES.

FOR a long time, Walter walked on in darkness, painfully stumbling, as his companions moved rapidly along, notwithstanding that two of them kept close beside him and held him by the arms, as before. He believed them to be Santoro and Colletta, but not a word was now spoken by any one, even Corrali himself. At the expiration of about an hour, the bandage was removed from the captive's eyes, and he found himself in a locality that was altogether strange to him. The sea had disappeared, nor could the white summit of Etna be seen in the distance, as when he had last looked forth; but he knew by the direction of the sun that they were marching towards that mountain, that is, to the south-east. The way was steep and difficult, to which circumstance, rather than to any mercy upon the captain's part, he attributed the removal of the bandage. There was no mercy to be read in the blood-shot eyes of the brigand chief, which roved hither and thither, more like those of a wild beast in search of prey, than of one who was beset by hunters. At times he would stop for a few seconds to sweep the landscape with his spy-glass; but, otherwise, there was no halt. Now plunging down steep ravines; now clinging to the sides of sheer precipices, upon a path on which there was room for but one foot to tread; now pushing through tangled scrub; now leaping from rock to rock across brawling torrents, they hurried on. Yet the brigands shewed no signs of fatigue. Walter could not but admire the unrelaxing vigour of their strides, and the indifference with which the various obstacles to their progress were met and surmounted. He had long ago given up his first opinion as to their want of activity, but it seemed to him now that their muscles must be made of iron. Pride alone, dislike to own himself, as an Englishman, vanquished in athletics by men of a race whom he had always held to be indolent and effeminate, prevented him

from throwing himself on the ground, and demanding at all risks a respite from this unceasing toil, while Santoro, a man nearly double his age, and who had had an extra journey that morning, as one of the bearers of Lilian's litter, strode on without a murmur by his side. To add to the difficulties of their forced march, the rain had begun to fall so fast and thick, that it not only wetted them to the skin, in spite of their capotes, but made the cliff-paths slippery and dangerous, besides shutting out the view beyond a few feet before them. To fall down some abyss seemed as likely as not to be Walter's fate, whose footsteps had become unnerved, and whose eyes were failing him; nor, in his desperate condition, did the prospect appear otherwise than welcome. Presently, as they descended into a little dell, up the other side of which he felt that his limbs could scarcely carry him, a small thin column of smoke was seen rising from the opposite bank. A halt was called at once, and the two men who had had charge of the cavern were sent forward to reconnoitre. Instead of returning, the brigand call was heard from the place where they had disappeared, and for the first time upon Corrali's face there appeared a look of satisfaction. Even this, however, did not last long, for, on their ascending the little hill, where, huddling around a scanty fire, were found the remainder of the brigand forces, he broke into passionate objurgations at their imprudence, and rushing at the cherished flame, extinguished it by standing on it with his feet. At this spectacle, a smothered murmur of disapproval ran round the band.

"What!" cried he, "do you prefer, then, to be shot like Amalli, or taken prisoners like Manfred and Duano, rather than to suffer a little cold and damp? Suppose it had been the soldiers, instead of ourselves, who had discovered you here?"

There was no reply; his logic was indisputable; but the rain was also descending in a continued stream, and anything more wretched than the appearance of the whole party, it would have been hard to imagine. The camp, from which, as it seemed, the brigands had been driven out by the troops that morning, had been a paradise, compared with their present place of refuge. It was indeed, now that the smoke had ceased, concealed from observation by a circle of stunted shrubs; but those were of no avail to keep off the sheets of rain, nor the

wind, which blew in furious gusts, straight from the snow-topped hills to eastward; the turf on which each man lay stretched was sodden with wet; nor was there a sign of either meat or drink to be seen among them. The sheep and goats had evidently fallen into the hands of the soldiers; nor had there been time to secure so much as a leg of mutton or a morsel of kid.

"Have you brought bread with you, captain?" inquired Corbara sulkily.

"I have brought what I went for," answered Corrali, frowning, and pointing to Walter. "If you are very hungry, perhaps he may serve instead of bread."

The captain spoke in bitter scorn; but Walter remembered with a shudder that among the frightful crimes he had heard imputed to this man, that of eating human flesh had been included. It was true that this had been done, not from hunger, but revenge: the shepherd, who had been pressed into the service of the troops to point out his hiding-place, having fallen into his hand, he had killed him, and broiled some of his flesh; but the recollection of this, joined to Corrali's grim reply, was indeed appalling.

"Where is the other prisoner—the English milord?" inquired Corrali sternly.

"We have put him under shelter," answered Corbara, "in a hole in the bank yonder."

"You mean to say, you grudged him his share of your fire," replied the captain contemptuously. "But who is guarding him?"

"Oh, he is safe enough. The fact is, in order the better to keep him warm, and at the same time to make sure of his remaining where he was, we put a rope round him."

"If he has come to harm, your life shall pay for it!" exclaimed Corrali passionately, and striding hastily towards the place the other had indicated. Walter followed, Santoro and Colletta, his shadows, moved, perhaps, by an impulse of curiosity, permitting him so to do, and, of course, accompanying him. The spectacle he beheld would have been ludicrous, had it not been so pitiful. In a hollow space at the foot of a thorn-tree, from which the wet earth had fallen away, and into which he exactly fitted, lay, swathed from head to foot in a sheepskin,

like a mummy or an Indian child, the unhappy form of the British merchant.

"Why, they have trussed the man like a fowl!" ejaculated Corrali.

"Have you brought me a fowl?" cried Mr. Brown eagerly, his knowledge of the Sicilian tongue, sharpened by appetite, enabling him to comprehend that single word.

"No, Milord Inglese; nor is it likely you will taste one in this life, unless your ransom reaches my hands pretty quickly."

"At least you can cut his bonds," pleaded Walter, "even if you cannot give him food. Such cruelty will not bring your ducats a moment earlier."

"Do you call this cruelty?" answered Corrali savagely. "Ah, by Heaven, in a day or two, if the gold does not come, you shall see, what you shall see! In the meantime, however, as you say, the man may scratch himself, if he has a mind;" and drawing his knife, he stooped down, and with two slashes—which shewed the operation was no novelty—freed the captive from his bonds. Then, for the first time, the poor merchant, who had been lying flat on his back, with his face within a few inches of the wet earth, was enabled to recognise his fellow-prisoner.

"Ah, Mr. Litton, what news of Lilian?" were his first words, as he scrambled into a sitting posture.

"She is in Palermo by this time, and in safe hands."

"Thank Heaven for that!" cried the old gentleman fervently. "Is she tolerably well? Has she been taken care of?"

"She was suffering from the shock of all she has endured, and from anxiety on your account; but the women who had charge of her had done for her what they could."

"Ah, then, they are human, it seems—not like their husbands and brothers," answered Mr. Brown, with a gesture of disgust. "Well, well, I must not grumble, since my darling is safe; but, may she never know what I have suffered!"

"Nay; I hope, in a few days, you may be able to tell her yourself; when your misfortunes, being over, will seem to you to have been less terrible than they now appear."

"Ah, you don't know what I have gone through, sir!" answered the merchant, throwing up his hands. "Nothing has passed my lips, to begin with, since you left me. I have been

shot at by a troop of soldiers ; dragged up such precipices, as one would have thought only a fly could have kept his feet upon ; and pricked with knife-points, until I ventured down them. This wet hole, into which they thrust me, seemed a couch of down for the first few hours, though I have, doubtless, caught my death in it. And to think, there have been times when I have fancied my sheets were damp, and clamoured for a warming-pan ! ”

It would indeed have been hardly possible to find a person of the male sex more unfitted to be hurried through a mountainous country, in wet weather, by a band of brigands, than the unfortunate merchant. He had never, perhaps, travelled in any rougher description of vehicle than an omnibus in his life, or inhabited any spot where such a convenience was not within call. Of late years—though he had given up his carriage to his daughters—he had scarcely made use of his legs at all ; while his surplusage of breath had decreased as his girth had enlarged ; and yet, there was a certain stubborn courage—a part of the same grit that had caused him to win his way in the world of commerce—which enabled him to wear a better front in presence of his persecutors than might reasonably have been expected. Even his complaints had a droll touch in them, and shewed no whining or despairing spirit—that is, while Corralli and the two brigands were standing by ; but when the chief had withdrawn himself, and the others had removed to a spot nearer to their fellows, and yet from which they could exercise the needful supervision over their captives, the old merchant's voice began to tremble. “ Yes, these blackguards will see the end of me, Mr. Litton ; I can never stand such another day's march as this has been. If I was your age, there would be a chance for me, though I was never fit for much in the way of walking ; but as it is, I would rather die in this hole here, like a rat, than suffer such fatigue.”

Walter was well aware that no such euthanasia as dying like a rat would be permitted his unfortunate companion, in case the ransom failed to be paid ; but it was not necessary to inform him of that circumstance. He only expressed his hope that they would not again be disturbed by the troops, so as to render another retreat in face of the enemy necessary.

“ In that case, my young friend,” answered Mr. Brown,

"it seems to me that we shall perish of starvation. Nothing, as I say, has passed my lips—with the trifling exception of a raw onion—for the last ten hours. I would give its weight in gold for a hunch of bread and cheese; or for 'a sandwich and a glass of ale,' such as they used to sell in the old days in Holborn for fourpence. Think of a sandwich and a glass of ale!"

"I am afraid I can command neither of those delicacies, Mr. Brown," said Walter; "but I believe I have something in my pocket—a bit of cold kid and a slice of bread, which was given to me by the signora——"

"Who was *she*? No matter; she must have been an angel," interrupted the merchant with vivacity. "I am sure you would not have mentioned it, had you not intended to give me a mouthful or two, eh?" and the old gentleman looked perfectly ghastly in his anxiety.

"My dear sir, you need it more than I, for I had a hearty meal before our march, and therefore you are welcome to the whole of it, such as it is." And Walter proceeded to empty the contents of his pocket into the other's outstretched hand.

"Hush! be careful," whispered the old merchant cunningly, "or those rascals will observe us, and snatch the precious morsel for themselves. Mr. Litton, you're a good fellow; you're a gentleman; you're a Christian! What mutton! Talk of Southdown, talk of Welsh! I don't think I ever tasted such bread! Where do they bake it, I wonder? You must have a bit—just a little bit, even if you don't want it—or I shall feel like a pig."

Walter did want it very much, and he accepted a small piece of what had been his own without apology.

"I know I am greedy," continued Mr. Brown naively; "but I have no shame, and that's a fact. I have not had such an appetite since I was so high, and used to put the skid on the omnibuses. The signora, as you call her, didn't happen to give you anything to drink with it, did she?"

"She had no opportunity for that, I am afraid," said Walter, smiling.

"Never mind," said Mr. Brown philosophically; "there's plenty of water—I haven't a dry rag on me—you have only

to make a hollow of your hand, and the skies fill it for you. To think that this is the Italian climate some fools are always boasting about!" It was astonishing how a little food had resuscitated the old gentleman. "Come, I drink the signora's health, though in a liquid utterly unworthy of her. What did you say her name was?"

"The name of the lady who gave me the bread and meat was Joanna."

"Well, Heaven bless her! I only wish she had given you some more. Here's to Joanna! There is no woman, with the exception of my own daughters, for whom, though I have not the pleasure of knowing her, I have so profound a respect."

"I don't think Mrs. Sheldon would like to hear you say so, sir," observed Walter involuntarily.

"Mrs. Sheldon? I don't care one threepenny-piece for Mrs. Sheldon!" answered the old gentleman tartly. "Why, it was through her advice that I was induced to come into this infernal country. And I don't mind telling you, that you yourself are making a great mistake, if you have any high opinion of that woman. It was she who set me against you at Willowbank, and I believe she told me lies; for a man who will give such mutton and bread as that away, when he does not know when he may get another meal himself, cannot possibly be a bad fellow."

There is no doubt that Mr. Christopher Brown had come to a correct conclusion respecting his young friend; but the reason which had led him to it at last was curious enough, when one considers how many others, and better ones, might have convinced him of it before. The fact is, that human nature, when thrown out of the groove of convention, is very soon reduced to its primary elements. It would probably have taken some time to make a brigand out of this eminent British merchant, because, to become so, he would have had to learn as well as unlearn; but he was very fast returning to the savage, out of which state the self-made man springs, Minerva-like, to the admiration of all who are not personally acquainted with him. Had he fallen amongst a tribe of American Indians, he would probably have become not only acclimatised, but nationalised in a twelvemonth. The knowledge that Walter had lost his liberty in attempting to give aid to himself and Lilian, had

evoked in him no such gratitude as the sacrifice had deserved ; their position had not then appeared to him so dangerous ; and above all, he had personally suffered neither pain nor privations ; but now—now that Lilian was safe, and he had nothing to think about but his own wretched condition—the gift of the bread and mutton had appealed to all the feeling that was left in him with irresistible force, and carried heart by storm. His observation with respect to Mrs. Shannon was perfectly genuine ; he hated the woman as one of those who had induced him to take his ill-fated journey ; but also because she had lied to him about Walter Litton, who had not only shared with him his last crust and kid, but offered him the whole of it. If the young fellow had done his best for the next ten years, under the conditions of civilised life, to conciliate Mr. Christopher Brown, he could not possibly have made so much progress with him, as he had done in as many hours and especially in the last few minutes—under the guardianship of Rocco Corrali. It is probable, that if he had even asked permission to woo his daughter, that the old gentleman would not have refused him, in that moment of gratitude and comparative repletion ; but, as Walter felt, and only with such reason, it was no time to flatter himself with any such hopes, even if other circumstances had admitted of their being entertained. Their position in the brigand camp had become perilous in the extreme. Even if the required ransom should be raised without difficulty, there would be a hundred obstacles to its being paid. The government, as in all such cases, would forbid it ; and now the troops had been called out, how was such a sum to reach the camp, when even the brigands themselves had escaped their hands only by the greatest exertions ? That it would take time to do so, was certain in any case ; a time of hardship and privation, such as one of the age and habits of Mr. Brown was very ill fitted to endure ; and, above all, was it likely that a man of the temper of the brigand chief would give them time ? It was much more probable that, in some moment of impatient fury, he would take his vengeance upon them both, and throwing interest to the winds, gratify a nature to which cruelty was at least as attractive as avarice.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON PAROLE.

THE apprehensions of Walter respecting the future fate of himself and his companion were, happily for the latter, by no means shared by Mr. Brown. Even when made to understand that there would be some difficulty in getting the ransom into the hands of Corrali, he could not conceive but that he would be willing to wait for days, and even weeks, for a sum that must needs appear to him indeed "beyond the dreams of avarice," and which he himself had been occupied for twenty years in amassing. He was not, it is true, so incredulous regarding the audacity of brigand behaviour, as during the first twelve hours of his capture; but he did not believe that they would proceed to such extremities as those at which the brigand chief was wont to hint. When, as often happened, the camp was short of food, under which circumstances the prisoners' fare was neither better nor worse than their captors', the merchant was more depressed than in the days of plenty; but otherwise, and provided the night's march had been of moderate length—for they always migrated to some new spot as soon as the moon rose—he was cheerful, and generally inclined for talk with Walter. They had been now a week up in the mountains, without any news from Palermo, and during that period, besides repeating those favourite fragments of his autobiography respecting his early struggles with which his companion was already acquainted, he had become unexpectedly communicative with him concerning his domestic affairs. It was easy to see that Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom, was no longer an object of admiration with his father-in-law, and his antipathy towards him obviously increased with every day's delay in the arrival of the ransom. A man of business would have got the thing managed within twenty-four hours of the receipt of the authorisation, he would say; and a man of courage and action, such as Sir Reginald

had the reputation of being, would have seen that the troops had made short work of the brigands, and procured their release that way; but as it was, nothing was done, and there might just as well be no Sir Reginald in existence. Of course, it would have been easy for Walter to have inflamed the old merchant's mind against his relative still more, by merely relating the truth about him, but he did all he could to discourage the topic; yet he could not help learning some particulars of the voyage from England in the *Sylphide*, which certainly shewed the ex-dragon in no favourable light. In that limited sphere of existence, and always under the eye of his companions, Sir Reginald had not been quite so successful as at Willowbank in concealing his true character. His harshness to Lotty, which her sister's eyes had long detected, had become visible to her father's also, who had not hesitated to express his opinion on the subject; the baronet, too, in a moment of ungovernable ill-temper, had expressed his own, which was to the effect, that persons in business had better stick to their business, for which they alone were fitted, and not interfere with officers and gentlemen in matters of behaviour, of which they were not qualified to judge. There had been, in fact, what Mr. John Pelter would have designated as "a rough-and-tumble" between the old merchant and his son-in-law, and though the quarrel had been patched up, the sticking-plaster had evidently been inefficient.

"I am not a man to be blinded by the glitter of a title, Mr. Litton," said Mr. Christopher Brown, "and you will remember how, from the very first, I opposed myself to poor Lotty's marriage with this gentleman. It would have been better for my own peace of mind, if I had been less soft-hearted, and refused to countenance it at all. It was wrong in me, as a matter of principle, in my position as a father whose wishes had been placed at defiance. The money that that fellow has had out of me in one way or another," added he, with an irritation that took his would-be dignity off its legs, "would astonish you, Mr. Litton and my impression is, that that money has been thrown away."

So frankly, indeed, did Mr. Brown converse about his domestic relations and private affairs, that Walter, feeling it was only to the circumstances of their position that he owed this confidence, and that in case the merchant should regain his liberty

he would repent of his candour, was quite embarrassed, and did all he could to turn the conversation into another channel. He questioned him about the time he had spent at Palermo—and, strangely enough, Mr. Brown never reciprocated this curiosity; either his egotism forbade him to inquire what had brought Walter to Sicily, or, having some suspicion of the cause, he refrained from alluding to it. Concerning the circumstances of his capture, however, the merchant conversed readily enough. He was always, indeed, eager for talk—perhaps because it prevented him from indulging in melancholy reflections, or apprehensions which were more serious than he cared to own. The seizure of the *Sylphide* had happened almost as much by accident as design, or rather luck had befriended the brigands to an extraordinary degree. Had even the light wind held with which the yacht had sailed from Palermo, its owner would have escaped their hands; but they had speculated upon the very thing that had taken place, and been successful. Unwilling to lose so great a prize as the person of the English milord, the hope of which had animated them for weeks, they had followed the course of his vessel, which was of necessity along the coast and close in shore; and, under cover of the night, embarked in a small fishing-boat, had boarded her in sufficient numbers to make resistance from unarmed men, taken unawares, without avail. The steersman, who was the only one on deck at the time of the seizure, had indeed tried to give the alarm, for which he had paid the penalty with his life's blood—the traces of which Walter and Francisco had discovered; but the rest of the crew had been overpowered without a struggle, and, since it was by no means Corrali's policy to encumber himself with useless prisoners, had been set upon the road to Messina, from which far-away town no danger could be apprehended from the troops for many days. Lest any of these sailors should make their way back to Palermo, the road, as we have seen, had been strictly guarded, though that, of course, did not prevent Francisco's return to that city, upon whose report, no doubt, the soldiers had been sent out by the governor.

It was to the well-meant efforts of these emissaries of justice that the inconveniences of Mr. Brown and Walter were now owing, and to which it seemed only too likely that their lives would in the end be sacrificed. It was positively certain that

Corralli would never permit his prestige to suffer by allowing them to be rescued alive out of his power ; and, on the other hand, the cordon was drawn so strictly all around them, that it was most improbable that those in charge of the ransom would be able to break through, and reach their ever-shifting camp. It was not even certain—for they had had no news from the city since Lilian had been sent back—that the ransom was on its way. Poor Mr. Brown had now become as eager to pay it as he had previously been disinclined to do so ; but the professional philosophy that had caused him to regard it as a bad debt, had given way to more serious considerations. He had got to understand that it was very literally the price of his blood. Fatigue and privations had not only shaken his determination, but long experience of his lawless masters had somewhat opened his eyes to their true character, and to the perils of his own position. He perceived that his throat was likely to be cut at any moment before he could cry "Police !" and that it would be of no use to cry it, even if he should have time ; but he did not understand yet that matters might take such a turn that he might be even glad to be put out of life by that summary process. Walter, however, from scraps of talk that he picked up from members of the band, was well aware that some terrible steps were in contemplation, in case the three hundred thousand ducats were not presently forthcoming. For one thing, both he and his companion had been carefully searched, and a pen-knife, which had been found upon Mr. Brown, had been taken from him—in order, no doubt, to prevent his anticipating their cruel treatment, by putting an end to his own existence. The old merchant affected to attribute this to mere malevolence, and bewailed the loss of the little instrument, because of its business associations—he had had it, he said, for twenty years, and had never mended a pen with any other blade ; but it was doubtful whether he himself had not some inkling of the fate in preparation for him. As to Corralli, he maintained a gloomy reserve, never addressing himself to his captives, as heretofore, but regarding them with a significant scowl, whenever his frowning eyes chanced to fall upon them. They were more strictly guarded, too, than ever, nor were they permitted, as before, to be together, but were located at opposite ends of the camp. It seemed to Walter that he had heard

of some such arrangement being made with respect to animals which were destined for the butcher's knife. In their case, it was not the way to fatten them, for, deprived of his companion, the poor merchant began to lose health, and flesh, and spirits; nor did his appetite, which he had possessed at first in such vigour, remain to him. It must be confessed that there was not much to tempt it. The cordon drawn by the soldiers grew every day more strict, and made the task of provisioning the brigands very difficult to the wretched peasants who undertook it at the twofold risk of their lives. They were shot by the military, if detected in aiding or abetting the bandits; and they were certain to fall victims to the latter, when the troops should withdraw, in case they omitted to provide them with food. It sometimes happened that, for days together, no supplies could be brought up, and then some of the band would steal down the mountain, under cover of the night, and bring back what they could: hard cabbage and garlic plucked from some village garden, a piece of sour cheese, and as much black bread as they could carry. It was a feast-day when they came upon a herd of sheep and goats—when they got as much milk as they could drink, and ate the mutton almost raw—with such infinite precaution had the fire to be kindled for cooking it, and of such small dimensions was its flame. And all this time the captives had no change of linen, and only on very rare occasions were they permitted the use of water.

When they had been living for more than a fortnight under these wretched conditions, which, as Walter at least was well convinced, were not likely to be exchanged for better ones, an incident happened which for the moment filled all hearts with joy. A little after sunrise one morning, the brigand call was heard in the valley to westward—that is, in the direction of Palermo—and the whole camp was at once on the *qui vive*. Certain members of the band had been stationed in the neighbourhood of the city, to expedite the arrival of the ransom, and it was confidently expected that they had now arrived with their precious burden. Even Corrali's face expanded into a grim smile at the prospect of this happy result, and for the first time for days, he addressed a few words to Walter.

"It is very well both for you and for me," said he, "that I

have been so long-suffering ; but, to say the truth, my patience had almost reached the end of her tether."

To Mr. Brown he even now did not deign to speak, but regarded him with a grudging look, as a victim who had escaped his vengeance, and whom he regretted to see depart with a whole skin. As for the rest of the band, they had no such repinings ; some evinced a childish delight by leaping and dancing, and others already began to gamble in anticipation of the gold that was presently to fill their pockets. In the meantime, Canelli had been sent down to see that all was right, and welcome the new-comers. Presently, he reappeared, making the signal of "no danger," but not that which had been agreed upon, to signify the arrival of the treasure. The captives were not aware of the reason, but they saw that Corrali's face began to gloom, and a shadow had fallen on the general gaiety.

Following Canelli, were now seen two striplings, looking even younger than himself.

"They can surely never have intrusted so much money to boys like that," observed Mr. Brown, who had begun to feel uneasy.

"Alas !" said Walter, "I fear there is no money."

"Then Heaven help us," sighed the merchant despairingly, "for I believe that man will shed our blood."

Walter did not answer ; he had recognised Joanna and Lavocca in the two new-comers, and a gleam of hope shone into his heart. He felt confident that the former would help them if she could.

The two women came up the hill without raising their eyes from the ground, and Canelli, as he drew nigh, kept shaking his head. It was easy to see that they had brought neither ransom nor good news.

"What brings you here, Joanna," inquired the brigand chief, in displeased tones, "when I bade you stay in the cave until you heard from me ?"

"A very ugly reason—the mere want of meat and drink, brother," answered she, with an attempt at lightness in her tone. "The villagers have brought us nothing for these three days, on account of the soldiers."

Joanna's swarthy face was very pale, and her large eyes seemed to stand out from her sunken cheeks. Lavocca looked

in even worse case, and when she had with difficulty reached the first tree that fringed their camp, she held on to it, as though her limbs needed support. It was evident that both of them were half-starved. Santoro was bounding forward to welcome his sweetheart, when the captain grasped his arm, and pushed him back. "Look to your prisoner," cried he gruffly; "that is your first duty.—Corbara, let the women have food."

It was an order by no means easy to execute, yet some morsels of coarse bread were handed to them, and a few drops of wine in a tin cup.

When they had refreshed themselves, Corrali began to make a speech, to which every one listened with the utmost interest. His words were uttered with such haste and passion, that Walter could with difficulty catch his meaning; but he seemed to be narrating the history of the band during the last few weeks. Whenever he alluded to his prisoners, his tone increased in bitterness, and he pointed rapidly from one to the other, and then in the direction of Palermo. The words "starvation," "loss," and "death" recurred again and again, and then he drew attention to the wasted forms and pale faces of the women. It was plain that he was crediting the unhappy captives with all the misfortunes that had befallen them since the soldiers had been called out. "And this ransom," continued he, speaking more slowly, and casting an inquiring look around the band—"this ransom, that was to pay us for all our trouble, and which we thought had just come to hand, where is it? Have we heard even if it exists, or if the bankers are willing to pay it? No; we have heard nothing."

"Nothing—nothing!" echoed the brigands gloomily.

"For all we know, this old man here may have been aware from the first that the money would not be sent; there may have been something wrong—purposely wrong—in his letter of authorisation; he may have trusted all along to the chapter of accidents, to the chances of escape, or of his being rescued by the troops; and, in the meantime, he may have been making fools of us."

A menacing murmur broke out at this, and many a face was turned with fury in the direction of the unhappy merchant, who, pale, and trembling with apprehensions of he knew not

what, looked eagerly at Walter, as though he had not been as powerless as himself.

"At all events," resumed the chief, after a judicious pause, "it is my opinion that it would be idle to wait this gentleman's pleasure any longer. As it is, we have borne with him far more patiently than is customary with us, and folks are beginning to say : ' This Corrali and his men are not what they were ; the presence of the soldiers alarms them ; captives have only to be obstinate enough, and they will carry their point against these stupid brigands.' "

"Stupid ?" repeated Corbara, playing with his knife, and glaring from Walter to Mr. Brown, as though debating with himself upon which to commence his operations. "We will let them know that we are not stupid."

"It has always hitherto been our rule, that when a ransom is not settled within a reasonable time, the captive should pay it in another fashion," proceeded Corrali ; "and in this case, when we have been driven from our camping-ground, shot at by the troops, into whose hands two of our men have fallen, and by whom one has been slain, is it right that we should make an exception ? Shall we ever see Manfred again, or Duano, think you ?"

"Never !" cried the brigands gloomily ; "they are as good as dead."

"We have the absence, therefore, of three friends to avenge ; one life, as it were, to count against us in any case. These two should, therefore, not be permitted to die slowly."

"You are right, captain," said Corbara, drawing his hand across his mouth, which always watered at the prospect of a wickedness. "But there is no reason why we should not set about the matter at once."

The two brigands to whose custody Mr. Brown was confided here each laid a hand upon his wrist, and Santoro and Colletta drew a pace nearer to Walter. It was evident that the long-delayed hour of revenge had come at last.

"I would wish to say a word or two, brother," said a soft clear voice, "before a deed is done of which we may all repent ourselves."

"You may say what you please, Joanna," observed Corrali

coldly; "these men, however, are not your prisoners, but ours."

"The English girl was mine, until you sent me word that she was to be set free," answered Joanna coldly; "and since you have taken her, I claim him yonder"—and she pointed to Walter—"as my captive in her place."

A shout of disapprobation burst from all sides at this audacious demand.

"It seems to me that the signora has fallen in love with our young Englishman," laughed Corbara coarsely.

Joanna's eyes flashed fire, and her cheek lost all its paleness for an instant, as the words met her ear; but she answered nothing, only looked with passionate appeal towards her brother, as though she would have said: "It is your place to cut that fellow's tongue out."

"Indeed, Joanna," answered he coldly, "such a proposal as yours seems to me to excuse a man's saying almost anything. These Englishmen are the common property of us all, and though it is true the signora was given to yourself, yet she was set free with a view to benefit you. You would have had a fair share of the ransom, had it been obtained, but it has not been obtained, and it is no fault of ours that the retaliation we intend to take for its non-arrival will not afford you gratification."

"Gratification!" echoed she, contemptuously. "When these men are dead—to-morrow, or the next day, or even the day after—will the recollection of your cruelties be worth to you three hundred thousand ducats? That the money has not arrived, is not their fault, but yours. If you had sent some responsible person to manage the affair, instead of a dying woman, you would have all been rich men by this time. Why, for all you know, she may never have reached the city alive, much more in a condition to settle matters with the bankers. Ask Santoro there, who helped to take her down to the village, whether she looked more dead or alive."

"The signora was very weak and ill, no doubt," said Santoro, upon whom a pleading look from Lavocca had not been thrown away. "It was my belief that she would not get over the journey."

"And yet, you intrusted this important affair to such an

envoy!" continued Joanna bitterly. "One would think that three hundred thousand ducats was a sum as easily extracted as the ransom of a village mayor."

"It is doubtless a large sum," observed Corrali coldly; "and since it has not been paid, the forfeit will be made proportionate."

"Yes; but it would have been paid, had you gone the right way about it; and if you are not all mad, or thirsting for blood, like that brute Corbara yonder, you may have it yet. Think, my friends, of what may be purchased for three hundred thousand ducats, and how much greater pleasure you will take in the spending of it than in what you now propose to do!"

"What you say is doubtless very true, Joanna," replied Corrali in the same tone; "but unless you have something else to propose to us than to have patience——"

"I *have* something else to propose," interrupted she; "I suggested that the error which you committed in sending a dying woman to negotiate so important an affair shall be repaired. Let another envoy be chosen, who will not let the grass grow under his feet. You talk of precedents, and surely this has often been done before. When a captive is taken with a servant, is it not our custom to send home the man to manage matters for his master's release? And though, it is true, this young Englishman here is no servant, he is of no more value to us in the way of ransom than if he were; while, on the other hand, he understands milord's affairs far better, being his friend."

"It seems to me, captain, that there really is something in this," observed Santoro, on whom the masked battery of Lavocca's eyes had been playing incessantly during her mistress's speech.

"Something, yes," laughed Corbara scornfully; "and it is easy enough to see what it is, so far as the signora is concerned."

Corrali looked carelessly about him, as though to invite others to express their opinions, if they were so pleased, and presently his eye fell on Canelli.

"Come, you are the youngest of us," said he, "and are not prejudiced in favour of brigand customs. How does it strike

you, merely judging by common-sense, with respect to this proposition of my sister's?"

"Indeed, it seems to me," returned the lad, with a glance of ill-favour towards Walter "that a bird in the hand is always worth two in the bush."

"Or, rather, you should say, in this case, Canelli, that two birds in the hand are worth one in the bush," observed the captain; a sally which evoked approbation, but no laughter, a sign that the brigands' humour was serious indeed. "You see, my dear Joanna," continued Corrali gravely, "that the opinion of us all—or nearly all—is opposed to yours in the matter; and, for my part, I do not wonder at it. It is true that this gentleman"—here he pointed to Walter—"is poor; but we fixed his ransom at a certain insignificant sum—three thousand ducats, which has not been paid. His life, therefore, is forfeited, as much as milord's yonder. If we send him on this embassy, what guarantee should we have that we shall ever see him again? At present, we have his skin; but if he gets to Palermo, he will pay us neither in purse nor person."

"That is clear as the sunshine," observed Canelli approvingly: "there will be but one prisoner left to us out of three, and not a single ducat."

"That is so," murmured a dozen voices. Even Santoro was obliged to acknowledge the merciless correctness of this arithmetic.

"You shall not lose the ducats," answered Joanna steadily. "In case the young man does not return on the appointed day, I will pay his ransom out of my own purse."

"You must be mad, Joanna," cried Corrali angrily.

"On the contrary, it is you that are mad, Rocco, who will risk nothing, when there is a prospect of gaining so much. I see plainly that, by this plan, we shall gain all we have looked for, and I am not blinded by passion, like some of you."

"By Heaven, I am not sure of that!" muttered Corrali between his teeth.

"At all events, my friends, you will have the three thousand ducats to do what you please with," said Joanna; "and if one of you should win it all at baccara, he will have a fortune."

"I like that idea, I confess," observed Colletta, who had great luck at cards; "besides, we should still have milord

yonder to amuse us;" and he pointed to the unhappy merchant, who, having long given up the attempt to understand what was going on, had sat himself down cross-legged, more melancholy than any tailor in a "sweater's" shop.

"In order that there may be no doubt about the matter, my friends," said Joanna, "you shall have the three thousand ducats at once—Santoro, yonder, knows where they are kept, and shall go with any one of you to fetch them this very moment."

Eloquence and logic are both very well in their way, but the conviction they carry with them is light when compared with the persuasive power of ready-money. The captain, indeed, was displeased, not so much that Walter should escape him, as because he felt that Joanna had made a fool of herself, on account of the young fellow, and that the three thousand ducats would be a dead "loss to the family;" and Corbara was furious, since the cruelties, for which he had as morbid an appetite as an American Indian, must necessarily be delayed. But, with these exceptions, the whole band were now in favour of Joanna's plan.

Walter had listened to these proceedings with intense interest, but even when the moment had apparently arrived for his being put to the most cruel tortures, he had scarcely been more moved than when he heard the generous proposal of his late hostess. While it was in debate, he had uttered not a syllable, nor even by a look expressed the gratitude with which it had inspired him, lest he should do it prejudice; but now that matters had declared themselves in his favour, he addressed the brigand chief as follows: "I am fully aware, Captain Corralli, of the great kindness which your sister has shewn me, and of the generosity of the offer she has made; it is impossible for me to over-rate the confidence she has reposed in me; but you may be certain of this, that it is not misplaced. If I am alive, I shall return to you at any reasonable date you may please to fix, either with my ransom or without it."

"And with your friend the milord's ransom," put in the captain quickly. "It is on that account—and not upon your own, remember—that we give you permission to depart."

Joanna was about to speak, but Corrali stopped her angrily: "You have got your way, woman, and be content with it.

The arrangement of the rest of the affair remains in my hands. —To-day is Tuesday. You will understand, then, at this hour, at eight o'clock in the morning"—and the captain again indulged himself in consulting one of his splendid watches—"you will present yourself on this very spot on Friday."

"The time is very short," pleaded Walter, "since there may be much to be done."

"Then we will say eight o'clock in the evening, which will give you twelve hours more. At eight o'clock next Friday evening, then, we shall know whether an Englishman can be trusted to keep his word or not. After that hour, we shall begin to send you little mementoes of your fellow-countryman yonder; first his ears, next his fingers, and then, one by one, his larger limbs, till he becomes a torso. If the word of an Englishman should fail, that of a Sicilian will not; I mean it, by Santa Rosalia!" and the captain took a silver image of the local saint that hung about his neck, and kissed it fervently, as an honest witness does the Testament at the Old Bailey.

"O Walter, Walter, you are not going to leave me!" cried the old merchant wofully, perceiving that his friend was about to depart.

"I shall come back again, Mr. Brown; I shall indeed."

"No, no; you will never do that," exclaimed the other despairingly; "it is contrary to human nature."

"I will, sir. So Heaven help me! as I am a Christian man, and a gentleman, I will return, either to set you free, or to die with you. There is some hitch about the ransom, and I am going to Palermo to expedite matters. Don't fret, sir; all will be well yet, thanks to this generous lady."

Poor Mr. Brown's sagacity had by no means penetrated the disguises of Joanna and Lavocca; if he had done so, and had understood the nature of the obligation which the former had conferred upon him, he would doubtless have duly acknowledged it; as it was, he only looked wildly around in search of a female form. Walter, who had been permitted to cross the camp, to bid his friend farewell, explained to him, not without some embarrassment, how matters stood.

"But what has made the woman so civil to us?" inquired the merchant eagerly.

"She has a kind heart ; it was she who sent the bread and mutton, when you were half-starved the other day."

"But she has got pistols in her sash, and a long knife," expostulated Mr. Brown, "and she wears——"

"Hush ! yes ; never mind. I must go now, for every minute is precious. Is it possible, think you, that anything should be added to the authorisation you sent by Lilian ?"

"Nothing ; it was quite in form. Still, I will write one line, if these wretches will give me pen and paper."

Corralli produced the necessary implements, and the merchant wrote: "Spare no expense, and trust implicitly the bearer ; (signed) CHRISTOPHER BROWN." "Give my dear love to Lilian, and should I never see her again, nor you——"

"You will see me again this day week," interrupted Walter hastily ; he thought it base to take advantage of such an opportunity, though it was evident that the merchant had been about to couple his name with Lilian's. "Good-bye, sir, for the present, and be of good courage."

"Farewell, Walter, farewell ; and God be with you !" answered the old man, with choking voice.

"Amen !" replied Walter solemnly.

Then the members of the band, with the exception of Corbara, who stood scowling apart, flocked round him to bid him good-bye ; the same hands which had been itching to inflict death and torture upon him an hour ago, being now held forth to him with good-will, and even gaiety. Corralli alone was grave.

"You will not misunderstand your countryman's position here, because of all this," said he, alluding to these manifestations of friendship.

"Neither his, nor my own," answered Walter with dignity. "I know there is no mercy to be expected for either of us, in case the ransom is not forthcoming."

"And yet you will keep your word ?"

"And yet I shall keep my word."

The captain smiled incredulously as he held out his hand. "Santoro here will be your guide to Palermo—and back again, if you ever do come back."

Then Walter looked about him for Joanna, for whose ear he had reserved some heartfelt expressions of gratitude ; but both

she and Lavocca had disappeared. He was distressed at this, yet, at the same time, was conscious of a sense of intense relief. He felt that Corbara had been right in imputing to the chief's sister a personal affection for himself, which it was impossible he could reciprocate. In that supreme moment, all coxcombry was out of the question, and matters were compelled to present themselves in their true light. Joanna loved him; and since he loved another, it almost seemed to him, though guiltless of deceit, that he had obtained the precious boon of freedom under false pretences.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SIR REGINALD TAKES HIS OWN VIEW.

AS Walter descended the mountain, accompanied by Santoro, his reflections did not permit him to pay much attention to the incidents of the way: when they had to let themselves down some precipice, his foot and hand indeed obeyed his will; and when, now and then, his companion bade him listen, in fear that they were approaching the troops, who would certainly have shot them both, without waiting for an explanation, he stopped and listened mechanically; but for the most part his own thoughts preoccupied him, and he only knew, or cared to know, that the direction in which he was advancing with such rapid strides was towards Palermo. The sense of sudden freedom did not occur to him with the force it had done when standing with Joanna in front of the cavern; for he was even less free now than he had been then; but the question, whether he should have his freedom eventually, agitated his mind perpetually. How many of us, in supreme moments—those of dangerous illness of ourselves or of others; or when prosperity or poverty is trembling in the balance; or when we await “Yes” or “No” from lips we love—have said to ourselves: “How will it be with me to-morrow; or the next hour; or when I shall presently return out of that door?” And so it was with Walter, as, free of limb, but a slave to his plighted word, he descended that Sicilian hillside. “How will it be with me four days hence, when I shall have to return yonder, laden with the gold that will be the price of our freedom, or empty-handed, and therefore doomed to death amid unspeakable torments?” Nor was it egotism—though egotism would, under such circumstances, have been very pardonable—that moved the young man to these considerations. Life was dear to him, no doubt, as it is dear to most of us at five-and-twenty, but there were dearer things than life concerned with that alternative which he was considering. If, for example, he

should not obtain the ransom, the cause of his failure would in all probability be what Joanna had suggested—namely, the inability of Lilian to prosecute the matter. She might have been too ill even to speak of it, or to place the authorisation in Sir Reginald's hands, on her arrival in Palermo; she might be delirious, and up to this hour have remembered nothing of the charge confided to her; or she might be dead. A cold stone seemed to take the place of Walter's heart, as this last idea occurred to him. If she was dead, what mattered it how it should be with him next week, or any week! He would die too, and thereby avoid breaking his word, for he had said: "I will return if I am alive." No; that would be only keeping his promise to the ear: he must live on, for the sake of the poor old man he had just left among those merciless wretches; must do his best for his enfranchisement, or comfort him by his presence in his miserable fate; for would not Lilian have had it so."

"Stop, signor; there go the soldiers," said Santoro; and on the road which had last come into view before them, could be seen through the trees a considerable body of troops moving towards the city.

"The cordon must be loosening," observed Santoro, "unless these men have been relieved. Now is the time to get money up to the camp, if we could only know where it was."

This was clear enough; and Walter was for pushing on at increased speed; but Santoro bade him pause, lest there should be more soldiers returning home, and they should find themselves between two detachments. The wisdom of this advice was made evident within the next quarter of an hour, by the appearance of another body of men almost as large as that which had preceded it.

"The troops have been recalled," murmured Santoro triumphantly. "The governor has grown tired of hunting us with the troops, and the road for the ransom is now clear."

"Let us hope so," answered Walter fervently; "but is it not possible that they have intercepted it?"

It was not unusual in similar cases for the government to direct its division among the troops; for though it made feeble efforts to put down the brigands, it was high-handed enough

in its measures respecting the illegal payment of the ransoms of their victims.

"No, no ; the soldiers would have talked and sung as they went by, had they had any success. Take my word for it, they have given up the whole thing, and have gone home in disgust."

At all events, Walter and his companion met with no further hindrance, and reached Palermo before dusk. Santoro, it was agreed, should not enter the city in his company, lest his connection with the brigands—though, having divested himself of his arms and jewels, he looked as "indifferent honest" as any other of his fellow-countrymen—should be taken for granted ; and the gate of the English burial-ground having been fixed upon as a place of rendezvous every evening, in case they should wish to communicate with one another, for the present they parted ; Santoro, in the highest spirits at the prospect of a few days of town-life, directing his steps to some friends in the neighbourhood of the Dogana, and Walter to the hotel upon the Marina at which Sir Reginald had lodged, and to which he did not doubt that Lilian would have been carried. He had some hesitation as to whether he should ask to see her, or the baronet ; but on consideration of the importance of the matter at stake, which seemed to override all ordinary and conventional rules, he determined on presenting himself to Lilian. But, in the first place, it was absolutely necessary that he should seek his own lodgings on the Marina. Unshaven, unwashed, ragged, and scorched with the sun, he looked more like a native beggar than the young English gentleman who had embarked in pursuit of the *Sylphide* some fifteen days ago. Baccari, who was standing at his house door, did not even move aside as he approached, but regarded him with no very favourable expression.

"I have nothing for you, nor such as you," said he, anticipating from this able-bodied but dilapidated stranger an application for alms.

"What ! Baccari, has a fortnight's stay with Captain Corrali, then, so altered your old lodger ?"

In a moment, the honest little fellow had thrown himself about Walter's neck, and was weeping tears of joy.

"Thanks be to Heaven and all the saints," cried he, "that you

have returned alive! Come in, come in! What a spectacle do I behold! Nothing has happened like it since my neighbour Loffredo's case. O the villains, the scoundrels! Welcome home!—A bath? Of course you desire a bath. I recognise you for an Englishman by that request, though, otherwise, you might be a countryman of my own—and, by Santa Rosalia, not one of the most respectable. You must be half-starved, my dear young sir; still, you are alive, and have come back again from that den of thieves. How delighted Francisco will be! The poor youth has never been himself since you left him, in spite of his good advice, and fell into the hands of those ruffians. Signor Pelter, too, I shall not now have to write to him to say: 'Our friend has been put to death by brigands.' While supplying his guest with food and everything needful, the good lodging-house keeper did not, in fact, for a moment cease expressing his thanks to Providence, and his congratulations on Walter's safe return. For the time, such genuine manifestations of good-will, succeeding to such hard conditions of life as those to which he had been of late accustomed, quite won the young painter from his despondency, and almost convinced him that he had really regained home and safety. But no sooner had he recruited his strength, and attired himself in a decent garb, than the responsibilities of his mission began to press upon him. Indeed, more than once had an inquiry concerning Lilian been upon his lips, which, nevertheless, he had not the courage to frame. At last, he turned round boldly to his host. "And now," said he, "tell me about the English lady whom Corralli caused to be sent back to Palermo. Since her father is still in his hands, I am come hither to effect the payment of his ransom."

"Ah! the ransom. Well, yesterday, I should have said you would have had but a bad chance, even supposing, as I do not doubt, that you have the means of raising the money. The governor, you see, is very indignant at the outrage, since it has happened to a rich Englishman, and not to a poor devil of a fellow-countryman like myself. Sir Reginald, too, and the British consul have been very importunate with him. Half the troops in the city have, therefore, been sent out to hunt the brigands, with strict orders, also, you may be sure, to let no money-bags pass through their lines. But to-day, as I hear,

the soldiers have been recalled, since Corrali and his men have taken their departure towards Messina."

"But the young lady—Mr. Brown's daughter—you tell me nothing of her."

"Well, indeed, my dear young sir, there is but little to tell; no one has seen her, since she was brought home to the hotel yonder, more dead than alive, except her sister and Julia?"

"Who is Julia?"

"Oh! that is the waiting-maid whose services have been secured for her, and about whom my son Francisco will tell you a great deal more than I can. I am very much afraid that the boy will marry her; and then there will be a family to keep by fishing, I suppose, and the little I can afford to contribute. They will want the house, too, for the children, and I shall be no longer enabled to let lodgings."

"For Heaven's sake, tell me about the young lady! Is she worse or better? Is she in danger?"

"I don't know about danger, but she is still very ill, I believe, and, unfortunately, wandering in her mind. The sun, it seems, was too much for her during that noontide journey, and she was ill before. My good sir, where are you going? It is out of the question that she should be able to see you."

"Then I must see Sir Reginald," said Walter decisively; "it is upon a matter that does not admit of a moment's delay." Upon the whole, he thought it wise not to communicate to the talkative Sicilian what the matter really was; if the authorities had really opposed themselves to the money being paid, the more secretly the affair was managed the better.

"Well, if it is about milord's freedom and the ransom," observed Baccari with an aggrieved air, "you may consider that as a public topic. Every one is talking about it: some say one thing indeed, and some another, but I can tell you this much—who have, unfortunately, had some experience in these matters—that, hitherto, Sir Reginald and the rest of them have been going the wrong way to work to procure your countryman's freedom; and not only the wrong way, but the very way to prevent it. Let the gold be put in a box—the money must be paid in gold, of course—and let it be carried out at night up to Corrali's camp; then milord will come down in the morning, a little thinner, perhaps, and by no means

pleased with our Sicilian ways (none of Corrali's captives are); but, after all, there will have been no harm done. Whereas, to send troops after these gentry is the way to make them flit—flit like cloud-shadows, from hillside to hillside, take their prisoner with them, until one day they get tired of carrying him about, and cut his throat."

"That is precisely my own view of the matter," answered Walter thoughtfully.

"Just so; and you have had a personal experience. Up to this moment, you will bear me witness, my dear young sir, that I have not put one question to you; though I have been hungering to learn your adventures almost as much as you were for your dinner. How did you fare? How did you sleep? Were there more than fifty of those scoundrels? (for that is what is reported). Did you see Joanna, who is dressed as a man?"

"My dear Baccari, I will tell you all that another time, but, for the present, I have not a moment at my own disposal."

And Walter took up his hat, and turned his steps to the hotel, which was but a few paces off. The brief exhilaration caused by good food and clean raiment—and by the latter scarcely less than the former—had now passed away, and his mind was full of forebodings. If he should be really unable to gain speech with Lilian, it would be difficult, he knew, to persuade Sir Reginald to change any course of action which he had once seen proper to adopt—difficult under any conditions; but now that they had ceased to be friends—not to say had become enemies—it was a task of which he well-nigh despaired. It was true there were other strings to his bow—the bankers, the consul, to be applied to, with whom, surely, his late experience, and the conviction that was borne of it, must needs have weight. But even his own impressions—notwithstanding that he felt himself as much tied and bound by his promise to the brigand chief as ever—were far different, now that he was free and among friends, than what they had been when in captivity; and he was well aware that it would not be easy to convince men who were living at home at ease, of the desperate condition in which himself and the old merchant really stood. On arriving at the hotel, therefore, notwithstanding that such a proceeding might of itself enrage Sir Reginald against him,

he asked to see Miss Lilian Brown. The porter, however, accustomed to continued enquiries upon the part of the British residents after her health, misunderstood his words, and replied that the young lady's condition was slightly improving, but that she had not yet recovered her senses. This was as bad as anything Walter could have expected, and of course put a stop to any idea of a personal interview.

"I wish to see her brother-in-law, Sir Reginald Selwyn," observed he, "upon business of great importance."

"Very good, sir. This way, if you please."

As Walter followed the man up-stairs, the terrible thought invaded his mind, that perhaps this poor girl had not been in her right mind since her arrival; that nothing had been done with respect to the authorisation, and that everything connected with the ransom would have to begin *de novo*. If the bankers in Palermo were as dilatory as the rest of their fellow-countrymen in matters of business, the time before him was short indeed. Walter was ushered into a sitting-room upon the first-floor, and requested to wait, while his name was sent up to the baronet.

"It is unnecessary to give my name," said he, after a moment's reflection; "you may say an old acquaintance from England."

It was just possible, he thought, that Sir Reginald might decline to see his quondam friend, after what had happened at their last meeting at Willowbank; and, moreover, he wished to judge, from the baronet's countenance, whether his presence in Palermo took him by surprise or not; since, if it did, it would be proof that Lilian had never been in a condition to relate to him what had taken place during her captivity. It was nearly a quarter of an hour before Sir Reginald made his appearance, expecting, doubtless, to see some casual London acquaintance, who, finding him at Palermo, had dropped in for an evening call.

His countenance changed, directly he set eyes on Walter; he did not, however, seem so much surprised, as annoyed and disappointed: his look of conventional welcome at once gave place to one of dislike and suspicion.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Litton," said he coldly, and pointing to a chair.

Walter sat down. Such a reception was almost an insult, but the circumstances were too serious to admit of his taking offence.

"You knew I was in Palermo, Sir Reginald, or at least that I had been so, I conclude?"

The baronet hesitated: "Yes; I have heard so."

"And also that I had been taken prisoner by the brigands, in company with your father-in-law, who is still, unhappily in their hands?"

"I did not hear that you were in his company when taken prisoner; indeed, I had reason to suppose that such would hardly have been the case."

This allusion to the merchant's quarrel with Walter, fomented as it had been by the speaker himself, and indeed solely attributable to him, was almost too much for Walter's patience; still he kept his temper.

"I was made captive, Sir Reginald, as you say, not in Mr. Brown's company, but in the attempt to give the alarm while there was yet time; I hoped to effect his release by force of arms. That time is unfortunately past; and it is my painful duty to inform you, that if immediate steps are not taken to pay his ransom, his life will without doubt be forfeited."

"That is what Captain Corrali says, I suppose," observed Sir Reginald contemptuously.

"He has said so, and, in such a matter, he will, without doubt, keep his word. If, within four days, the whole three hundred thousand ducats are not in his hands ——"

"Why, that is fifty thousand pounds!" interrupted Sir Reginald: "a modest sum, truly, to be asked for by a highwayman."

"But is it possible that I am telling you this for the first time?" exclaimed Walter, feeling that his worst fears were indeed realised. "Did not Miss Lilian tell you with what mission she was charged?"

"My sister-in-law was brought to the city in a dangerous and almost desperate condition, quite unfit to attend to any matters of business."

"Business! But this is an affair that concerns her father's life. Do you mean to tell me that she never gave you the authorisation for the payment of the money, which I saw Mr. Brown write out with his own hand?"

"I have seen no such document, nor is any such in Miss Brown's possession," answered the baronet steadily. "As to the enormous sum you have mentioned, it is true that she has spoken of it more than once, but it was very naturally taken as the utterance of a disordered intellect. She has been wandering in her mind—as well as prostrated by fever—ever since her return."

"The sum is perfectly correct, Sir Reginald, and not a ducat less will be taken by the brigand chief. It is the price of Mr. Brown's life—and of my life also (though I do not wish to speak of that), since I have promised to return either with or without it within four days. We are both dead men, if ——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Litton," said Sir Reginald, smiling, "if I recommend that you should take some rest and refreshment before you speak any more on the topic. It evidently excites you, and if, as I conclude, you have just escaped from these scoundrels' hands, you are hardly fit to judge of them dispassionately. You are naturally disposed to exaggerate their power and determination, and to give them—or rather to persuade others to give them—whatever they choose to ask."

"Sir Reginald, I am as cool and collected as yourself; I have told you nothing which is not true, except that it is not the whole truth. Your father-in-law will be put to death—of that I am satisfied—in some most cruel and shocking fashion, if you turn a deaf ear to what I say. Ask any one in Palermo who is acquainted with the brigand customs in such cases, and I am confident they will bear me out in what I say."

"I scarcely think you are quite aware of what you say, Mr. Litton," answered the other, in a cold calm voice: "you just expressed your resolve to return in person to these gentry, in order that you yourself may be put to death. You are a little eccentric in your conduct (if you will permit me to say so), even now, but you would, in that case, be stark staring mad."

"I know that many people think it madness to keep their word, when it happens to be to their disadvantage," answered Walter quietly; "but that is beside the question. I am pleading for your father-in-law, not for myself. And I must insist, in his name, and for his life's sake, that an immediate search be made for the authorisation of which I have spoken."

There was a short pause, during which the baronet frowned

heavily and bit his lip, as though in doubt. "The word 'insist' is one which is utterly out of place in this discussion," observed he presently; "but I make allowance for your excited condition, which, indeed, the circumstances of the case may well excuse. Moreover, I should be loath, for old acquaintance' sake, to refuse you satisfaction in so simple a matter." Here he rang the bell, and bade the servant request the presence of Lady Selwyn. "My wife," said he, "who is in constant attendance on her sister, shall at once make search for the paper of which you speak. I conclude you will trust to her report, if not to mine."

"Trust, Sir Reginald!" echoed Walter excitedly. "Do you suppose, then, that I think you capable of having ignored this authorisation, or of concealing it? Why, if you knew of it, and yet kept it back, you would be a murderer—ay, just as much the assassin of your wife's father——"

"Here is my wife," broke in Sir Reginald. "Pray, keep this extravagant talk of yours, Mr. Litton, somewhat within bounds, or at least reserve it for male ears." He spoke with sharpness as well as scorn, but Walter heeded him not; his whole attention was riveted by the appearance of Lotty, who was standing pale and trembling at the open door. She had evidently heard his words, and was looking at her husband with inquiring yet frightened eyes. "A murderer!" she murmured—"an assassin!"

"Yes; those were the words this gentleman used, and which he applied to me, madam," said the baronet scornfully. "Does it appear to you that I look like one or the other?"

"But what does he mean, Reginald?"

"Gad, madam, that is more than I can tell you. He has been raving here these twenty minutes about his friends the brigands, who have sent him, it seems, for a trifle of fifty thousand pounds, as the price of your father's release."

"As the price of his life, Lady Selwyn!" answered Walter solemnly. "He wrote out an order on the bankers for that sum, and sent it by your sister's hand; but Sir Reginald tells me it has not been found. I adjure you, if your father's existence is dear to you, to discover what has become of it."

"Indeed, Mr. Litton, I will do my best," said Lotty, with a glance at her husband, such as those animals who have been

trained to do things contrary to their nature always throw at their master before commencing a performance. "My sister is very ill——"

"He knows all that," interrupted Sir Reginald hastily. "She is much too ill, of course, to be interrogated on any such matter. But, if the authorisation—this document Mr. Litton speaks of—was confided to Lilian, it must, of course, be still in her possession. I don't say that I would act upon it, mind, even if it was found, sir," added he, as his wife left the room; "my idea is, that one should never treat with these scoundrels save sword in hand; that we should give them lead and steel—not gold."

"Nay, Sir Reginald; I am sure if you were to read your father-in-law's words, written as they were in the dire expectation of death, these scruples would weigh as nothing."

"Well, well, we shall see. I need not trouble you to wait; but in case of Lady Selwyn's finding this document, I will send word of the fact to your address, if you will furnish me with it."

Sir Reginald took out his tablets, and wrote down the number of Mr. Baccari's house, like any other trifling memorandum.

His coolness seemed frightful to Walter.

"And if the document is *not* found, Sir Reginald?"

"Well, really, in that case, I cannot see what is to be done, more than has been already done. The troops were promptly sent out, and in considerable force——"

"They would have been useless in any case," put in Walter earnestly; "but, as it happens, they have been withdrawn——"

"Indeed! I had not heard of that," returned the other quickly.

"It matters not. I repeat, that all armed intervention would be useless."

"You must really allow others, as well as yourself, Mr. Litton, to exercise some judgment in this affair. The British consul, the governor of the town, and the humble individual who has the honour to address you, are all of one opinion, and it is diametrically opposed to your own. As to the other matter, you shall be communicated with, if the necessity arises. Good-morning to you."

Walter rose, and left the room without a word. He could

not trust himself to speak more with this man, who treated the capture and death of a fellow-creature—not to mention that he was a near connection of his own—with such philosophic indifference. He could not imagine that he had utterly failed to convince Sir Reginald of the peril of his father-in-law's position. On the contrary, a dreadful suspicion had taken possession of him, that the baronet was well aware of it, and had his own reasons for affecting to ignore it. Why should it have entered into his mind that he (Walter) would not believe his report concerning the existence of the authorisation, unless he had been conscious of a wish—perhaps of an intention—that it should not be found? If Lilian, who was said to be seriously ill, were to die, the whole of her father's wealth, should he be put to death by the brigands, would revert to Sir Reginald, through Lotty. The perspiration stood upon Walter's brow, at the contemplation of such wickedness as these ideas suggested, but yet they remained with him; he did not, as of old, repent of having entertained such evil thoughts of his former friend; he felt that Selwyn was a selfish, heartless fellow from skin to skin. Moreover, the look of suspicion, as well as dread, that his wife had cast upon him, when Walter had said, that he who would keep back the document would be almost as guilty as Corrali himself, had not been lost upon him; it seemed to imply, not, indeed, that Sir Reginald had done such a thing, but that the person who knew him best conceived it possible that he might be capable of doing it. These thoughts crowded upon him as he sat alone in his little chamber waiting for news from this man; there was no relief to them, unless the picture of Lilian wasted to a shadow, as he had seen her last, but with her beautiful eyes lacking the light of reason, could be called a relief. When an hour had thus passed by, he could bear it no longer; inaction had become intolerable to him, and he once more bent his steps towards the hotel. His importunity seemed to have been anticipated, for no sooner had he again inquired for Sir Reginald, than he was informed that the baronet had stepped out, but had left a message to the effect that "he had nothing further to communicate to Mr. Litton." As he left the door, the gun of the observatory announced to the townsfolk sunset—to him, that one day of the allotted four he had yet to live had expired.

CHAPTER XL.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

IT was too late that night to call upon the consul or the bankers, on whom, indeed, his mind misgave him it would be of small use to call in any case; but a sudden impulse caused him to seek the gate of the English burial-ground. Even if Santoro were there, he could obviously afford him no assistance; and it was to the last degree improbable that he should be there, on that first evening of their arrival, and when he might naturally conclude that the young Englishman would have no need to see him. Yet he went on the bare chance of his being there. His heart seemed to yearn for the one companion with whom, if he had no sympathy, he had at least something in common, who shared with him that knowledge of his own perilous position which it seemed impossible to induce any one else in Palermo to share. The broker's man who sits in possession of the poor man's goods may not take pity upon him, but he knows the sad fact of the position, and is so far preferable to the friend who ignores his ruin, or disbelieves it, and would fain have him shout and sing.

Finding Santoro at the spot agreed upon—"Why, you could hardly have expected to see me so soon?" said he.

"I did not expect it, signor; but I had my orders not to lose a chance of communicating with you."

"Indeed! It struck me that the captain did not trouble himself much about the matter."

"It was not the captain; it was la signora, answered the other significantly.

Walter felt the colour come into his cheeks, as he replied as carelessly as he could: "But you are not one of la signora's men; I understood that only those two who came up from the cavern were under her directions."

"That is so, signor; but one that is dear to her is very dear to me."

"Ah! Lavocca?"

"Yes, signor. So I would go through fire and water to serve her," answered he simply.—"Have you any news?"

"Bad news. It is that I wished to see you about. The authorisation which Mr. Brown sent for the payment of the ransom is not to be found. Are you sure that no one could have possessed himself of it, while the English lady was being brought back?"

Santoro shook his head. "That is impossible. In the first place, it would have benefited no one; and in the second, no one would have dared."

"That is also my opinion. But, at all events, it has disappeared, and without it, I fear not a ducat can be raised. My idea is, that you should return at once to the camp, and bring back another order from Mr. Brown."

"But that would be very dangerous, signor."

"How so, when the troops have been withdrawn?"

"Oh, the troops are nothing; it is Corrali himself that I should fear to meet. It is contrary to his wishes that we came down here: his patience is already exhausted, and he would not believe one word of such a tale as this. My return, I feel confident, would be the signal for putting milord to death at once. You don't know the captain's temper, signor. And then there is Corbara to egg him on. Of course, I will go, if such is your wish, but that is my conviction."

In vain Walter attempted to move Santoro from this opinion, delivered with all the gravity of a judge *in banco*. It was certain that he was in the best position to speak positively upon such a matter; and he had no motive for misrepresenting it. Walter felt convinced, against his will, that upon himself alone depended the success of his mission. Yet without the authorisation, how could he hope to induce the bankers to advance such a sum, or the tenth part of it? To be sure, he had Mr. Brown's credentials in the paper he had given him at parting, which begged them to put confidence in the bearer, and to hasten matters as much as possible; but what was the tag of the play without the play itself. If the sum had been a thousand pounds, or even five thousand, it might easily enough have been raised, under such an urgent necessity; but fifty thousand pounds! He felt that the task he was about to undertake was almost hopeless; but yet he must needs attempt it, by whatever

means he found available. He shook hands with Santoro, and returned alone to his own lodgings. Francisco met him at the door with, for him, quite extravagant signs of welcome and satisfaction.

"I never thought to see your face again, signor," exclaimed he. "I was right, you see, about these gentlemen of the mountains. Well, you have seen Corralli face to face, and yet escaped him with a whole skin and a whole purse. That is what no other man in Sicily can say for himself, save you and me."

Walter did not think it worth while to undeceive him; he was resolutely bent upon returning to the brigands; but he did not wish to be made out a martyr, nor even, as Sir Reginald called him, a madman, for so doing: he felt that his own opinion and that of the world, as to what was right to be done, would be at variance, and he did not wish to discuss the matter.

"Then the young lady too," continued Francisco with quite unwonted loquacity; "she has reason to thank her stars, for it is better to be ill in Palermo than to enjoy the best of health up yonder," and he pointed towards Mount Pelegrino, "without a roof to one's head, and among bad company. They say that Joanna is a she-devil."

"Then they do her a great injustice, Francisco," answered Walter gravely. "But how did you know that the lady had been with Joanna?"

"Oh, well, there is a friend of mine, a young woman at the hotel, who has no secrets from me, and as it so happens, she is the signora's nurse for the present."

"But did the signora tell her then?"

"I suppose so. Who else? Certainly she told her?"

"But Sir Reginald himself informed me that she was delirious—not capable of understanding what was said to her."

"I believe that is so. She chatters on, poor thing—so Julia tells me—by the hour together. Can you guess one particular person whom she talks about, signor?" The boy looked roguishly up in Walter's face. "Ah, I say to Julia, when you go out of your mind, you will talk of me, as your mistress talks of Signor Litton."

Under other circumstances, the piece of information would have had an interest for Walter absorbing enough—though,

indeed, by this time he possessed the full assurance that Lilian loved him—but there was something else that the lad had dropped which riveted his attention even more.

"Then, when the lady first came back to Palermo," returned he anxiously, "she was aware of all that had happened to her? It is only lately that she has lost consciousness. Is that so, Francisco?"

"I believe so. I will ask Julia, if you like, when I see her next."

"By all means ask her. But when will you see her?"

"Perhaps to-morrow, perhaps not till the day after; it depends upon the signora's state whether she can get away or not. But the next time she shall give me all particulars: you may look upon the matter as settled."

This information moved Walter greatly, as corroborating his worst suspicions, for, if it should turn out to be correct, it must needs follow that there was foul play on the baronet's part with respect to the concealment of the authorisation, or, at all events, of Lilian's mission. She would hardly have spoken of her imprisonment, and of Joanna, without mentioning the very purpose to effect which she had obtained her freedom.

The next morning, as soon as business hours commenced, Walter presented himself at the British consul's, and told his story, to which that official listened with attentive courtesy. Nothing, however, he said, could be done, so far as he was concerned, more than had already been done. The authorities at Palermo had acted promptly, and as duty plainly pointed out to them, in sending forth the troops; and all that he could do, if it was indeed the case they had been withdrawn, would be to demand that they should make another attempt to compel the brigands to surrender their captive. As to the ransom, it was not to be expected that the Sicilian government would assist in its collection, or even countenance its payment. That was a matter for the consideration of Mr. Brown's bankers.

All this, Walter felt to be perfectly reasonable; but what secretly galled him was, that beneath all this polite logic he could plainly perceive a profound incredulity, not, indeed, in his story, but in the reality of Corrali's threat. It was evident that the consul had not become acclimatised, but still believed the personal safety of a British merchant to be invincible

even from a brigand. That Mr. Brown might be shot in a skirmish, he believed to be probable enough ; but that he should be put to death in cold blood was something out of the region of possibility. Walter congratulated himself that he had made no mention of his own peril, since he felt that his anxiety would in that case have been set down to an exaggerated sense of personal danger. At the English banker's, to which the consul was civil enough to accompany him, he was admitted to an interview with one of the members of the firm, and at once presented Mr. Brown's memorandum—"Spare no expense ; trust implicitly to bearer."

"Bearer !" repeated the man of money ; "why, this is almost as bad as a blank cheque."

Here the consul interposed with a few hurried words of Sicilian, which, though he caught their meaning but indistinctly, made Walter blush with indignation. He perceived he was indebted to that gentleman's good offices for convincing Mr. Gordon that he was really the person indicated in that document.

"You see, sir, this is a matter of business," explained the banker ; "and when we are asked to put implicit confidence in a man, we like to be sure it is the right man. It seems unlike a man of business such as Mr. Brown that he should have written such a memorandum at all."

"If you were half starved, and surrounded by brigands with cocked pistols, sir, you would not be so scrupulous about technicalities," observed Walter, still a little sore at the nature of his reception.

"We are well aware of Mr. Brown's misfortune, and regret it deeply," answered the banker with stiffness ; "but still the form"—and again he looked at the slip of paper suspiciously—"is unusual."

"It is, however, but the corollary of a document that should have been long ago in your hands, Mr. Gordon—an authorisation for the payment of three hundred thousand ducats as ransom."

"Three hundred thousand ducats !" exclaimed the banker. "Why that is preposterous !"

"No doubt, it appears so ; yet, if one possessed the money,

one would, I suppose, give it to save one's life." And with that Walter once more told his story.

It was plain the banker was much moved, for he had lived much longer in Sicily than the consul, and therefore knew more of brigands.

"Well, it is a huge sum," he said; "and to raise it within so short a time we shall require help from the other banks, which, however, will no doubt assist us in such an emergency. Mr. Christopher Brown has no account with us to speak of, but his name is no doubt a good one. It will be a great risk, and yet one which, under the circumstances, it may be our duty to run."

Walter felt as though this man were giving him new life; he had heard, and had believed, that money could not save men from death, but here was an instance to the contrary.

"However, no step can, of course, be taken in the matter without the production of the authorisation," continued the banker.

"Alas, sir, I have told you that it cannot be found."

"But if it is not found, Mr. Litton, it must surely be plain to you that you are taking up my time to no purpose. Not that I grudge it to you, under the circumstances; but you cannot be serious in expecting us to raise a fortune upon such a security as *this*"—and he held out the slip of paper between his finger and thumb, in a very hopeless manner—"for an almost total stanger."

"Then, God help us!" said Walter.

"In what relation do you stand towards Mr. Brown, young gentleman?" asked the banker, struck by the earnestness of this reply.

"I am only his friend, sir, and his fellow-sufferer."

"But I understood that he had relatives with him."

"He has two daughters—one of them, as I have told you, seriously, I fear, dangerously ill—and a son-in-law, Sir Reginald Selwyn."

"But surely it was his duty to have accompanied you here to-day;" and once more, as it seemed to Walter, there came into the banker's face that look of distrust with which he had first greeted the presentation of his credentials.

"Sir Reginald is not aware of my visit to you, Mr. Gordon,

nor even of my possession of this paper. I came straight from Mr. Brown himself, who had no reason to doubt that the authorisation was in your hands."

"Let it be searched for thoroughly, Mr. Litton. If it is not found, you must perceive for yourself how utterly futile is any application to our firm."

"Forgive me, sir, for having taken up so much of your time," said Walter, rising; "that I was pleading the cause of a dying man—one whose life, that is, is as good as lost if this money be not paid—must be my excuse."

He said not a word concerning his own peril, nor, indeed, at the moment did it occupy his thoughts. The hardness, if not the villainy of Sir Reginald; the misery of Lotty; the pitiable condition of poor Lilian, unable to speak a word upon a subject so vital to her father; the old merchant's impending fate—all these things oppressed Walter's mind, and made the world by no means a place that he felt loath to quit. The despondency and despair in the young man's face touched the banker's heart.

"Search, I repeat, Mr. Litton, for this authorisation," said he more kindly, as he held out his hand; "but if it cannot be found, still come to me again, to-morrow at latest. Indeed, we will do for you what we can."

With which poor gleam of hope, Walter took his leave.

CHAPTER XLI.

A LAST APPEAL.

WHEN death is drawing nigh us, we do not blink at the truth of matters, as when we have time to toy with it; and Walter, who, though so young and strong, was yet—if he kept his word—upon life's brink, felt his own mind convinced that even if the authorisation still existed, it would not be permitted to leave the hands that held it, since those hands (he felt equally sure) were Reginald Selwyn's. Yet not the less on that account did it behove him to do his best to obtain it. It was a bitter humiliation to have to make application to this man once more, and the more so because to him, and him alone, he had confided that his own life was imperilled as well as that of Mr. Drown; but for the latter's sake he was resolved to do so. He accordingly called at the baronet's hotel, to request another interview. The reply brought to him by the servant was, that Sir Reginald had not yet risen. He called again an hour afterwards, and found that he had gone out. As Walter had left a pressing message on the first occasion, and since his own lodgings were only a few paces from the hotel, it was now evident to him that Sir Reginald intended to avoid him. He therefore sat down, and wrote a letter, in which he once more urged the immense importance of the document with which Lilian had been intrusted; stated his firm belief that it had not been lost upon the way into the town; and adjured him, if he wished to save his father-in-law from a cruel death, that he should use every effort to discover it. "If it indeed be lost," wrote he, "you can certify to that effect, and your personal presence at the banker's may, even as it is, be of some avail." He added this, in case Sir Reginald had destroyed the paper, from unwillingness to let so large a slice out of the family fortune be sacrificed, rather than with the actual intention of benefiting himself by the merchant's death; or to give him opportunity of repentance and reparation, if he

had indeed contemplated so great a crime. To this letter, and not until late in the evening, a verbal answer was delivered at Walter's lodgings, to the effect that Sir Reginald had nothing to add to what he had already communicated to Mr. Litton. The method and terms of this reply struck Walter as being equally suspicious; it seemed to him that the baronet was not only resolved not to commit himself to paper, but that he had purposely avoided any direct reference to the authorisation itself. Should Lilian recover, there would, therefore, be no direct evidence (except from Lotty, which was as good as none) that the document had ever been inquired for at his hands; while, if she died—the merchant and himself having fallen victims to Corrali—Sir Reginald would only have to account to his own conscience for his share in the transaction. At the same time, Walter felt that it would be useless to make public this terrible suspicion, that had not indeed sprung up in his own mind in a single night, for it had its roots in long experience, but which must seem to others of monstrous and abnormal growth.

The first thing on the morrow, agreeably to the invitation he had received, Walter once more presented himself at the English bank. Mr. Gordon received him with much kindness, and he fancied that there was a smile of something like assurance on his face, as well as welcome.

"Well, sir, and have you found this authorisation?" were his first words.

"No, Mr. Gordon; and I frankly tell you that I think it will not be found."

"But who could have taken it? Of what use would it be to any human being, save to Brown himself, and this rascal Corrali, whose people would be therefore the last to have stolen it?"

"I cannot say, sir," replied Walter gloomily; a reply that expressed the state of the case more literally than his interlocutor imagined. He could indeed make a shrewd guess of what use it might be to a certain person, but he could not say so. "I can only repeat that it is not to be found."

"Well, that is very unfortunate, because it would have made matters comparatively easy," answered Mr. Gordon. "I have, however, been in communication with my partners on the mat-

ter, and they are willing, under the very exceptional circumstances of the case, to make an exceptional effort. We cannot treat, of course, with you as a principal; but if Mr. Brown's son-in-law and daughter will come to us in person, prepared to make an affidavit respecting this document, and to execute a deed guaranteeing us against the loss of the money, it shall be raised by to-morrow morning. It is most unfortunate that Mr. Brown's other daughter should be ill, but we must take her acquiescence for granted."

Mr. Gordon evidently imagined that he was not only making a very generous offer, which in truth he was, but also one which would be greedily accepted by the parties concerned; and the gloom that still overshadowed Walter's face irritated him not a little.

"If such an arrangement does not come up to your ideas of what is liberal, Mr. Litton," said he sharply, "they will differ very much from those of the commercial world, I promise you."

"Your offer, Mr. Gordon, is most liberal, most generous—I acknowledge it with all my heart; but I am doubtful if it will be of any service. Sir Reginald Selwyn told me that even should the authorisation be found, it would be a question with him whether he should make use of it. As a matter of principle, he said he objected to treat with brigands at all, except with the sword; and as for a guarantee, it is my firm impression that he will never give it."

"Indeed, indeed," said the banker thoughtfully. "This is, then, a very serious business, for if Sir Reginald positively refuses to execute the deed I spoke of, we can do nothing." At the same time, I cannot think that he will venture to refuse, in the teeth of public opinion. People will not hesitate to say that he let his father-in-law be put to death, in order that—his wife being, as we conclude, co-heiress—he might inherit his money."

"My belief is, Mr. Gordon," answered Walter gravely, "that he will let people say what they please."

There was a short pause, during which the banker regarded him with fixed attention.

"You have had no quarrel with Sir Reginald, I presume, sir?" inquired he presently.

"There has been no absolute quarrel, but we are certainly not on good terms. I must confess I have no good opinion of him."

"Well, I am glad to hear that, because I hope you are judging him harshly. Go to him at once, and state the case exactly as it stands. Here are his father-in-law's bankers prepared to advance this ransom upon the guarantee of himself and Lady Selwyn, and on the understanding, that Miss Lilian Brown, on her recovery, and in case of anything going wrong with the money, will join with her sister in seeing us righted."

"Of that I will be answerable with my life—that is, if my life were worth anything," added Walter hastily, his thoughts mechanically recurring to the brigand camp.

"Well, certainly, your life would not be a very convertible commodity, Mr. Litton," answered the banker, smiling, "although I am sure it is a valuable one. I hope to see more of you before you leave Palermo, and under more pleasant circumstances. Above all, I hope to see you again to-day, and accompanied by Sir Reginald and Lady Selwyn."

Directly he understood that the baronet and Walter had quarrelled, it was obvious that Mr. Gordon took a less serious view of the matter, and had little apprehension of any serious obstacle on Sir Reginald's part.

"I will do my very best, sir," answered Walter earnestly; "and whatever happens, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Good-bye, Mr. Gordon."

"Nay! don't let us say 'good-bye,' but 'good-day,'" said the banker, shaking hands with him, and accompanying him to the door. "On Tuesday we have a little dinner-party, and if you will allow me, I will send you a card of invitation to your lodgings."

A card of invitation for Tuesday! Never, perhaps, did such a simple act of courtesy awaken such bitter thoughts as those which filled Walter's mind as he took his way home through the crowded streets. All about him was full of light and life, but upon his inmost heart the shadow of death had already fallen. His firm conviction was, that his fate was sealed, and that no Tuesday would ever dawn upon him in this world. He could do his best with Sir Reginald, of course—though his best should include no word of appeal upon his own ac-

count ; if his own life alone had been in peril, he would not have stooped to ask it of him at all—but he had an overwhelming presentiment that his visit would be fruitless.

At the hotel, he was met, as usual, by the statement that Sir Reginald was not within.

"It is no matter ; I will go in and wait for him," was Walter's quiet rejoinder ; and there was a determination in his tone which it was not in Sicilian nature—or, at all events, in the nature of a Sicilian hotel porter—to resist. He walked upstairs, and entered the sitting-room of the baronet without announcement.

Lotty was seated there alone, and thinking, no doubt, that it was her husband, she did not even look up from her employment. Her back was turned towards him, and she was engaged, or appeared to be so, upon some sort of needle-work, but he noticed that she passed her handkerchief rapidly across her eyes, as he entered the room.

"Lady Selwyn," said he, "forgive this intrusion, but my business admits of no delay."

She sprang to her feet, and faced him with a frightened look.

"Oh, Mr. Litton, does Reginald know ?"—She hesitated, and he could see she trembled in every limb.

"That I am here ?" answered Walter quietly. "No ; he does not know it, but it is necessary he should do so. I am come on the gravest errand, and one on which hangs your father's life."

"O sir, you must be mistaken," replied she, her eyes filling with tears ; "it cannot be so bad as that. Reginald assures me that it cannot."

"Your husband cannot know the facts, Lady Selwyn, as I know them. To-morrow will be your father's last day on earth, unless one of two things happens. One is, that the authorisation which your sister brought with her from the brigands' camp into this house, shall be forthcoming."

"I cannot find it ; I have searched everywhere ; indeed, indeed, I have," returned she earnestly.

"Perhaps Sir Reginald could find it, if he tried."

Lotty's pale face assumed an awful whiteness, and her teeth began to chatter as though with cold.

"No, Mr. Litton, he cannot," she gasped. "It is lost, lost, lost!"

"You mean, that I am too late," said Walter sternly—"that it has been destroyed."

"I don't say that, I don't say that!" cried Lady Selwyn passionately. "I did not see him do it; but yet, in ignorance of its importance, he may have done it. What was the other hope—the other chance? O help me, help me, Mr. Litton, to save my father!"

"The other hope—and the only other hope—lies in yourself."

"In me!" exclaimed she joyfully; "then he is saved."

"In you, and in your husband." The light faded from her eyes in a moment, and she uttered a deep sigh. "Yes; you and he have only to present yourselves at the English bank this day, and execute a certain deed, and the ransom will be paid."

"I will ask him, Mr. Litton; I will beseech him; but you know" (here she smiled a wretched smile) "that I have not much power; and he is so convinced—being a soldier, you see, himself—that the better way is to send the troops. Perhaps—he will be very angry, I am afraid, to find you here—but still, perhaps you will not mind seeing him yourself."

"I shall most certainly see him myself, Lady Selwyn."

"And do not give him an opportunity for quarrel," continued Lotty earnestly; "for my father's sake, and for Lilian's, be careful of that. Bear with him, Mr. Litton."

"I will endeavour to do so," answered Walter gravely. Her advice was good so far as it went; for it was likely enough that Sir Reginald would endeavour to escape what was required of him, by means of a quarrel; but, then, was it not still more probable that he would contrive to quarrel in any case?

"How is Lilian?" inquired Walter. "You may imagine the pressing importance of my visit here, since I have not put that question before. The porter in the hall, however, informed me that she is much the same."

"No; she is better," said Lotty, dropping her voice, and looking cautiously round; "I can give you that much comfort. She is herself again—quite herself—though, of course, as weak as a child."

"Ah! if it were ten days hence, instead of to-morrow—to-morrow!" murmured Walter involuntarily.

"Why so, Mr. Litton?"

"Because Lilian herself could have then gone to the banker's; but at present that would, of course, be out of the question."

"O yes, quite. In three days' time, however, I think she would be strong enough to see you—and I am sure it would please her."

"In three days' time! This woman had already, then, forgotten," thought he, "the fate that awaited her father within less than forty-eight hours. What a weak and wavering nature was hers, how impressible, and yet how easily every impression was effaced! How could it have been possible that there had been a time—and not so long ago—when he had thought of her as one of the noblest of womankind! How different, and how inferior was she to his Lilian!"

This was somewhat hard on Lotty, for she had not forgotten what Walter had told her respecting her father, only she did not think matters were quite so bad as he described. She believed him more than she believed her husband, but it was natural that she should believe the latter a little—not that she did not know him to be untruthful, but because she was loath to think of him so ill, as it would be necessary to do, if Walter were right in his forebodings. She had also the tendency of her sex, to think all risks much less than they were represented to be.

"I suppose," said Walter, not without a tremulousness in his tone, "that it would not be possible for me to see Lilian, either to-day or to-morrow morning, even for a few minutes?" It seemed so hard to go to the grave without bidding her good-bye, though he knew it would cost him so much; as for her, it would cost her nothing in that respect, since it would be dangerous, as well as useless, to tell her how matters really stood.

"Well, you might see *her*," said Lotty, hesitating; "but I could hardly promise that she could see *you*. Perhaps the day *after* to-morrow, when she has had her afternoon sleep, and is at her best, she might bear the interview. She has often spoken of you, and even asked for you, though sometimes I doubted whether she knew what she was saying; and considering what

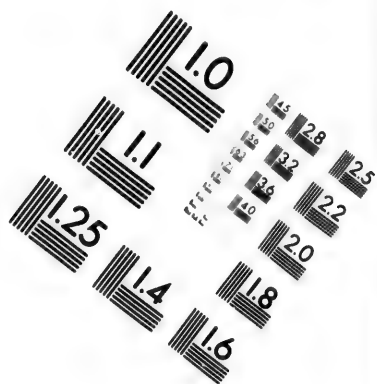
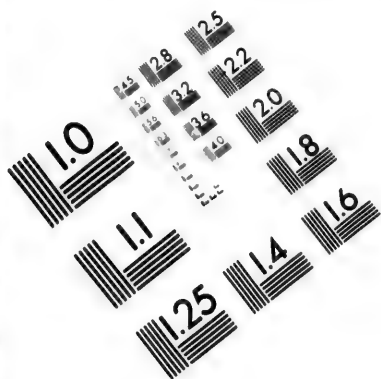
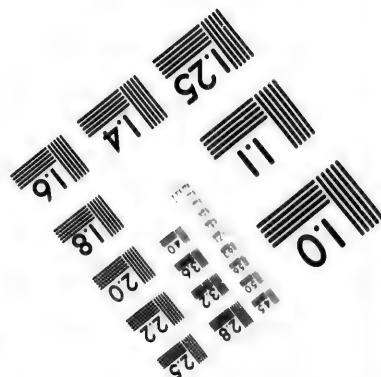
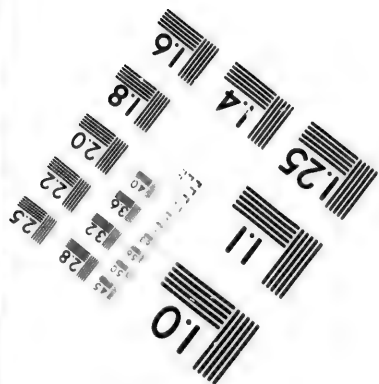
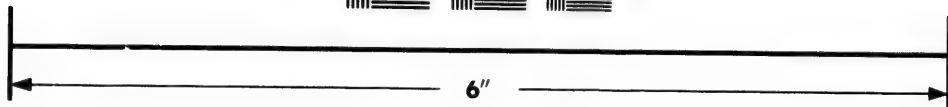
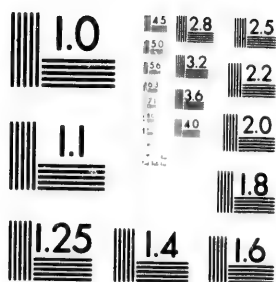


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you have undergone together, I cannot think there can be any harm—and Reginald has said nothing against it—yes ; I really do think we might say the day after to-morrow.”

It was almost a relief to Walter, finding poor Lotty what she was, to hear Sir Reginald's stern voice in the hall (doubtless rebuking the porter for having given his visitor admittance), and to feel that from him he would at least definitely know his fate. It was easy to see by Lady Selwyn's face that she heard it also.

“Shall I go, Mr. Litton,” murmured she hurriedly, “or shall I stay ? If you think I can be of any use——” It was evident enough which alternative the poor lady preferred, and Walter was disinclined to put her to pain ; moreover, it was as likely that the presence of a witness would harden Sir Reginald in his villainy—if villainy he intended to commit—as that it would shame him into propriety ; and again, if the baronet proved obstinate, Walter would be compelled, for her sake, to mitigate the indignation and contempt which in that case he was fully resolved to express towards him.

“It is just as well I should see your husband alone, Lady Selwyn,” said he gently ; and Lotty disappeared through one door, as Sir Reginald presented himself at the other. “It seems to me, Mr. Litton, that you are very importunate,” were his first words, as he closed the door carefully behind him. Neither the action nor the unaccustomed pallor of the baronet's face escaped his visitor. They were evidences to him that this man had made up his mind upon the matter in hand, but at the same time was ashamed of his resolution, or, at all events, was well aware that disgrace would be imputed to him.

“Where two men's lives are in such imminent peril, Sir Reginald, I do not think that any endeavour to save them should be termed importunity. The authorisation intrusted to your sister-in-law's hands has, it seems, been lost.”

“You have already had your answer upon that point,” replied the other coldly. “As to its being ‘lost,’ indeed, I cannot say, because that supposes such a document to have been in existence ; but, at all events, it has not been found.”

“And I conclude, Sir Reginald, I may take it for granted that it will not be found ?”

“I do not understand you, Mr. Litton.”

But it was plain by the red spot on his cheek-bones, and the hard glitter of his eyes, that he was well aware of what was meant.

"We are quite alone, Sir Reginald," said Walter in firm significant tones, "and there is no reason why I should not speak plainly. The loss of this document, I must needs remind you, which includes also the sacrifice of your father-in-law's life, would be to you a great gain. It behoves you, therefore, for your reputation's sake, if for no better reason, to——"

"My reputation, sir," interrupted Sir Reginald contemptuously, "can stand any slur which Mr. Walter Litton may choose to cast upon it."

"I do not speak of myself; I am merely quoting the opinion of Mr. Gordon, the banker here, which will, I am sure, be shared by every one of our countrymen in this place, that if you refuse to assist in rescuing Mr. Brown from the cruel hands which threaten him, your conduct will be open to the gravest suspicions. The money which it is well known you would inherit by such a course of proceeding, would doubtless be a consideration—but it would be blood-money."

Sir Reginald was trembling with rage in every limb, but yet he restrained himself, as Walter knew he could never have done, had he been imputing to him less than the truth. "It is certainly very agreeable, Mr. Litton," said he in a hoarse voice, "to find that others, beside yourself, are interesting themselves so much in my private affairs; but it is just as well—if they are to be made public—that the facts should be thoroughly understood. You accuse me of concealing, or destroying—for it comes to that—a certain document, the very existence of which I do not hesitate to deny. It is true my sister-in-law has mentioned the very sum you speak of—the monstrous amount of which, by-the-by, seemed well to consort with her unhappy condition—but as to seeing it stated in black and white, that, nobody has done. Yet, because I don't produce it, you go about the town, it seems, accusing me of refusing to assist my father-in-law in obtaining his freedom. I have done my best—and in accordance with the judgment of those best fitted to advise in such matters—by getting the troops sent out, and I am prepared to do aught else—short of what is utterly unreasonable—to further the same end."

"In that case, then, Sir Reginald," said Walter gravely, "my object in coming here to-day is accomplished. I am commissioned by Mr. Gordon to inform you, that if you and Lady Selwyn will present yourselves in person at the bank to-day, that your guarantees for the money will be accepted in place of the authorisation, and that in that case Mr. Brown's ransom will be forthcoming at once."

"What! the three hundred thousand ducats."

For the moment, astonishment had dulled Sir Reginald's wits; instead of being ready with an excuse for not conforming to this unexpected offer, he could only oppose an incredulity which the facts must needs overcome. The idea of his personal guarantee being accepted for such a sum as fifty thousand pounds—one hundred part of which in ready-money he had rarely possessed in his life—had utterly overwhelmed him.

Walter began to think that his own difficulties were over, and ventured to smooth away those which seemed to present themselves to Sir Reginald.

"Your guarantee," said he, "it is true will be but a matter of form. When Mr. Brown regains his liberty, he will, of course, be glad enough to pay the money; only, in the absence of the authorisation, the bank needs to be assured of this, by his daughter and yourself."

"But if he does not regain his liberty, and the money is taken by the brigands all the same?" observed the baronet. "Supposing even they were to kill him—as you have told me is possible—and these three hundred thousand ducats go into Corralli's pockets all the same?"

"That is to the last degree improbable; such a breach of faith has never been known among these people."

"Improbable! But is it impossible? that is the question. As to honour among thieves, to be sure there is a proverb to that effect, but it would scarcely justify me, I should imagine, in putting such a temptation as fifty thousand pounds in the way of a Sicilian brigand. No, Mr. Litton; I am sensible—you may tell Mr. Gordon—of the compliment he pays me; but I must decline to accept such a responsibility—to undertake an obligation which I have no means of discharging—should things turn out a miss—as a man of honour."

"I must again remind you that we are quite alone, Sir Regi-

nald," said Walter bitterly, "and that I know you perfectly well. You have undertaken obligations before now which you had much less chance of discharging than this one, and with much less important objects. Your scruples upon this matter, when I saw you last, and when no such opportunity as the present offered itself, were confined to making overtures to the brigands at all, who, you said, must be treated with, on principle, by the sword alone. Those scruples, it seems, you have forgotten; but you have found others more adapted for the new conditions. I do not doubt that in any case you would find reasons enough to excuse you from following the course which duty and humanity alike point out to you. As for me—if you persist in this wickedness—I shall be a dead man to-morrow night; but do not imagine that I shall die unavenged. I will leave behind me a statement of your conduct, in this matter, towards your relative, which, so soon as the news come of our double murder, shall be published far and wide. You will be rich, perhaps, for it is possible—I have no doubt you are speculating upon her illness turning out fatally even now—that you may obtain poor Lilian's inheritance as well as that of your wife; but you will never purchase, I do not say the respect, but the recognition of your fellow-creatures. You will be held as a man accursed. That you are brave—in one sense, at all events—I am well aware; but you will not be brave enough to hold up your head when the finger of public scorn is pointed at it?"

"Have you done—have you quite done?" inquired Sir Reginald coldly. "Have you any more theatrical effects with which to favour me?"

"I have nothing more to say, Reginald Selwyn, except to put the question for the last time: Will you stir a finger to save your father-in-law's life, or will you not?"

"If you mean, by stirring a finger, will I become a party to a negotiation with brigands?—no; I will not!"

"Mr. Gordon was right," said Walter bitterly, as he rose from the chair. "There was a time when Reginald Selwyn was a gentleman and a soldier; but I know now for what, in his cruel heart, he knew himself to be, a scoundrel and an assassin!"

Sir Reginald leaped to his feet, but the passion which, in the days that Walter had referred to, would have prompted him to strike his adversary to the earth, gave way immediately to calculations of prudence. He reflected that a conflict with his quondam friend at such a time would be most damaging to his interests and reputation. Walter, waited quietly for the expected assault—in truth, he desired nothing better than to grapple with his enemy, with little solicitude for what might be the result of such an encounter ; but perceiving that it was not to happen, uttered but one word, “Coward !” and looking steadily in the other’s face, turned on his heel, and left the room.

CHAPTER XLII.

WALTER SETS HIS HOUSE IN ORDER.



GREAT poetess has described for us the aspect under which death appears to man in his various ages ; but the welcome which but too many of us are ready to give it, she has forborne to sing. There are many thousands in this little land of ours, I do not doubt, who would receive with joy a summons to eternal peace, if it were only to be cessation from trouble, and nothing more. For such, indeed, the idea of heaven is far too high, as that of hell is far too monstrous. Only to rest, and to be out of the world, is their piteous desire. It is probable that the establishment of life-assurance societies has prolonged human existence more than all the appliances of science before and since their era. There is many a man for whom not only Prosperity and Pleasure are over, but even Hope itself, who feels not only old age, and poverty and care, growing over him like mosses upon a wall—though, alas, not so painlessly—but comfortless despair ; there is many a man, I say, who, if himself were alone concerned in the matter, would certainly end all with a bare bodkin, without much fear of the after-dream. It is true, indeed, that what we fear is worse than what we feel ; but the feeling is, in this case, sharp and sensible, while the fear is vague and shadowy. With what bitter but secret smiles do church-going men often listen to homilies about the joys of life, and the eager clutch with which humanity clings to it ! Still, doubtless, on the whole, the poet is right ; to most men—let us thank God for it—life is dear. To youth, it is especially so, for to them even, if it may sometimes seem that it would be well to die, the Preacher's words are true, "that heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Thus, as we have seen, it had lately appeared to Walter Litton that existence had no great boon to offer him, and that he might let go his hold upon it without much regret ; but now that he was standing in the shining street, with the

sea one smile before him, and the voices and laughter of his fellow-men breaking in upon his ear, it again seemed hard to die. He was not yet three-and-twenty, and in perfect health and vigour; the slight hurt that his few days of scarcity and exposure upon the mountains had done him or, perhaps, had only seemed to do him, was quite passed away. There was no reason—save that terrible bail-bond of his word he had given to the brigand chief, and which was to be exacted on the morrow—why he should not live for the next fifty years; breathe the soft air, feel the warm sun, gaze into the pure depths of yonder sky, and eat and drink and be merry with his fellows. If only that little promise of his could be blotted from his mind—and only from his own mind, for no one else would reproach him for breaking it—he felt that his life might be a happy one. Should Lilian recover, of which there now seemed to be good hope, she would undoubtedly accept him for her husband, in spite of any representations of Sir Reginald. To have love, riches, health, and youth within his power, and yet to exchange all to-morrow—to-morrow—for a cruel and lingering death, was a terrible thought indeed.

The contrast did not, however, present itself in the form of a temptation. He did not need to picture to himself the disappointment of the unhappy old merchant at his non-appearance in the brigand camp, nor the mortification of Joanna at that evidence of his want of faith; indeed, they would both, he knew, be glad that he had thus escaped his doom, since it was to be escaped no other way; nor did the thought of the bitter triumph of Corrali over his broken word affect him in the least, for it never entered into his mind to break his word. He was going back on the morrow of his death, as he had always intended to do, should things turn out as they had done; but he had not expected them so to turn out; and his disappointment was very bitter, and his regrets very keen. He had no sense of any heroism in his own conduct, but only of the hardness of the fate that necessitated it; and he was furious against the selfish and murderous greed of Sir Reginald. If religion required of him, in that hour of wretchedness, to forgive the man, who, if not the actual cause of it, had, by his criminal inaction, conducted to it, Walter was not religious; he hated and despised him infinitely more than Corrali himself, and in all the dark

turmoil of his thoughts, kept this one clear and distinct before him—that so far as in him lay, Reginald Selwyn should not escape unpunished. There are many good and wise axioms that require to be acted upon with a difference, according to the character of those with whom we have to deal. A soft answer, we are told, for example, turned away wrath; and it doubtless does so in many cases; but there are others in which conciliation is not only thrown away, but increases the fury of the wicked man, since he conceives from it that he may be furious with impunity. Another excellent precept is, to leave evil-doers to the punishment of their own conscience; but here also it is necessary to be convinced that in the particular case such an instrument of chastisement exists. To have left Reginald Selwyn to the stings of remorse, would have been much the same as to have inflicted a fine of five shillings upon a millionaire for murder. Walter was firmly resolved to inflict no fine upon him, but such a penalty as he must needs feel. He therefore made use of one of the few hours of life remaining to him, to draw up a detailed statement of the facts of Mr. Christopher Brown's capture and imprisonment, with special reference to the ransom which would have procured his release; the mysterious disappearance of the authorisation, and Sir Reginald's lukewarmness concerning it; the negotiations with the banker, and the baronet's refusal to sign the guarantee: nor did he hesitate to point out how, by such a course of conduct, the latter's material interests had been advantaged at the expense of his unhappy relative. This paper he sealed up, and addressed to the British consul, with a request that it might be made public so soon as the fatal news from Corralli's camp should reach the city. Of himself, he said little, beyond describing the circumstances of his compelled return to the brigands, which would naturally afford to his statement the weight which attaches to the evidence of a dying man.

A much more painful, if less important task then claimed his attention, in bidding farewell to Lilian. It was necessary to do this in writing, since, even if he should have the chance of seeing her (which now seemed improbable), it would have been impossible, in her fragile condition, to communicate to her the true state of the case. He did not waste many words upon Sir Reginald, with whose character he knew Lilian was well ac-

quainted, and of whose conduct in the present matter she would hear the particulars from other sources ; but he solemnly laid the fate of her father and himself at the baronet's door, and adjured her to rescue Lotty from his hands, which, as he pointed out, it would be easy to do by making some pecuniary sacrifice. "He has no wish, you will find," he bitterly added, "to keep his captive for her own sake ; but in his willingness to accept ransom, you will find him the counterpart of Corrali himself." Finally, he asked Lilian's pardon for the involuntary share he had himself taken in the marriage of her sister, with the man who had thus brought ruin on them all. The rest of his letter described the steady growth of his affection for herself, which, although all hope of its fruition seemed denied to him, had induced him to come abroad, in the hope of being of use to her, under circumstances which had given her just cause for apprehension. Unhappily, his efforts to assist her had been unavailing, but he besought her to believe that he in no way regretted them ; he had done his best, and failed ; but to have done less than his best would have been a greater pain to him than his failure was. Then he spoke of their common youth, and entreated her not to grieve unreasonably, or for long, over his decease. Fate had only permitted them, within the last few days, to express to one another their mutual love ; if he had lived, it was true, it would have lasted as long as life itself ; but since he was doomed to die, it was contrary to nature and reason that her young love should be wasted on a dead man. He gave her his full leave—"Such a permission," wrote he, "will seem preposterous to any other than yourself, but you will feel that I have the right to give it ; and I foresee that it will one day be a relief to you"—to marry whom she would. And he wished her happiness in her wedded life. Walter felt that his letter was egotistic ; but also that she would make allowance—then and always—for the circumstances under which it was composed. The *Ego* was strong within him. As he looked out from his window, earth, sea, and sky seemed to have the same personal reference to himself, that they have to dying men. He saw them now, but after one day more he would never see them. The sun was setting, so far as he was concerned, for the last time save one. The mighty world, so full of light and life, would go on as usual, but not for him ; he was about to drop

out of it, and the darkness of the grave to close around him. After that, he knew not what would happen to him, nor did any man know. He could only bow his head in reverent faith. He was not afraid of falling into the hands of God, nor did he repine in an unmanly manner. But as he thought of Lilian, and of all that might have been, but which was not to be, the tears gathered in his eyes. His mind, too, wandered back to Beech Street, and faithful Jack Pelter. He did not feel equal to writing to him, but he would learn all that had taken place, and he could trust him to construe all aright, so far as he was himself concerned. By his will, made when he came of age, by his lawyer's advice, he had left him—the only friend who had at that time “shewn himself friendly”—what property he was possessed of; and it was a comfort to him now to think that, notwithstanding his feckless habits, poor Jack would never want. He had put aside some portion of his ready-money to pay for his own interment in the English cemetery (a favourite spot with him), should his body be recovered from the brigands; and the rest he had allotted to Francisco, as the marriage portion of his bride. These, with the letters, he intended to leave out upon the morrow, in order that they might be found after he had left the city. And now all matters having been thus provided for in this world, he was sitting at his open window, thinking unutterable things.

“Signor!”—he started, so deep was he in meditation that he had not heard any one enter his apartment—“signor, I have news for you.”

It was Francisco's voice, the tones of which were always musical, but which had acquired of late—born of his new-found love—the tenderness of a brook in June, “which to the leafy woods all night singeth a quiet tune;” his passion had rendered him sympathetic, as well as eloquent. “You have scarcely touched your dinner, my father says; but you will eat supper when you have heard my tidings. The English young lady is better, still weak and worn, poor soul, and a mere shadow to look at: you must not be frightened at that.”

“What can she see me, then?”

“Yes; she will see you: not to-night, because it is too late, but to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!” The very word seemed to sound forlorn

and sad, as he uttered it. "It will be early, then, I hope, Francisco."

"Yes; it will be very early. After her night's rest, says Julia, her mistress is at her best and strongest, and she wishes to see you, signor, ah, so eagerly!"

"A thousand thanks, Francisco. You will find that I have not forgotten this good service."

"Oh, do not speak of that. But you must really eat something, none would think that it was but two days ago that you came back half-starved from the mountains."

A sharp pang ran through Walter's frame; he had been reminded of a thing forgotten—namely, his appointment with Santoro for that evening.

"Come, signor, let me bring you supper."

"Presently, Francisco—in half an hour or so; I have something to do first in the town." He turned back to the window, unwilling to prolong this talk, and Francisco, with an anxious glance at his English friend, and a dubious shake of his fine head, withdrew from the apartment. Immediately afterwards, Walter took up his hat, and repaired to the usual rendezvous, where he found Santoro awaiting him. He at once informed the brigand that all hope of obtaining the ransom was at an end, and inquired at what hour it would be necessary to start upon the morrow.

"We should be off before noon," was his quiet reply, "since it takes much longer to climb a mountain than to descend from it."

"Then I will be here before that hour."

"Hush! Not here, signor, but at the end of the Marina," answered the brigand in low tones. "This place is growing too hot for me; certain inquiries have been made, I find, and it is necessary that I should leave the town to-night."

"You do not suppose, I hope, that it is through anything I have said——"

"No, no; the signor is a man of honour; but he has been watched and followed. A brigand's eyes never deceive him."

Walter could not but think that his companion was mistaken, for not only had he been unconscious of any such espionage, but he knew of none who could have any interest in his coming and going. Still, it was obvious that Santoro was un-

easy, and since it was unnecessary to prolong the interview, they parted at once. As Walter went back to his lodgings, he cast a glance up to the rooms which the Selwyns occupied at the hotel, and saw Sir Reginald smoking and sipping coffee on the balcony; and as he was the only man who was likely to take any note of his proceedings, the brigand's suspicion seemed to him more baseless even than before. Walter's supper was brought up to him by Baccari himself, and not, as he had expected, by Francisco, and the good lodging-house keeper was unusually silent. His guest was content, however, to observe the change without making allusion to it, since, to be left alone with his own thoughts, was, on that night what was to be his last on earth, which he most desired.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE TEMPTER.

SLEEP, Walter had feared, would have been impossible for him, under the circumstances in which fate had placed him ; but Nature, while we are young, is kindly to us, and gave him several hours of refreshing slumber. He welcomed them not only for the forgetfulness they afforded, but because they would give him strength to bear, whatever brigand cruelty might have in store, with such manliness as belonged to him, and, above all, to support the old merchant as much as possible by the exhibition of a bold front. When Francisco came, therefore, as had been agreed upon, at an early hour, to conduct him to the hotel, he found the young Englishman calm and collected, and with even less disquietude in his manner than such an interview as lay before him would have seemed to warrant. Had his own position, indeed, been less momentous, the circumstances under which he was about to visit Lilian would have been painful and embarrassing enough, nor, perhaps, in that case, would he have sought to see her at all. Not only was it in some degree a risk to her as respected her health, but the proceeding itself was clandestine—that is, unknown to Sir Reginald, who, after all, was, in the absence of her father, her natural guardian and protector. However, it was no time now for the entertainment of any delicate scruples. At the door of the hotel, he was left by Francisco in the hands of Julia, a soft-eyed Sicilian, who, since Lilian had not her English maid—for whom there had been no room on board the *Sylphide*—had been appointed to the post of sick-nurse. As she led the way up-stairs, and passed the floor occupied by the Selwyns, she answered an inquiring look that rose to Walter's face.

"Sir Reginald is asleep, signor, nor will he rise for the next two hours ; but you will see Milady Selwyn."

This was a great relief to Walter, upon Lilian's account, even

more than upon his own, since Lotty's presence would afford full authority for his visit ; and when, at the next landing, he found her at the door waiting to receive him, he felt more kindly towards her than her weakness had permitted him of late to do. He knew that she was daring much, in thus admitting him to her sister's presence, without the knowledge of her husband, and that to dare was, with her, to act against her nature.

"You will not talk with her long," pleaded she, "Mr. Litton, will you ? Lilian is very weak and feeble ; and, above all things, refrain from speaking about—about that matter we were talking of yesterday."

"About your father's peril ?"

"Well, about your apprehensions upon his account ; Sir Reginald assures me that there is no real danger. There is nothing to be gained by dwelling on it ; and if my sister should share your fears, it would have a very bad effect upon her."

"You may rely on my prudence, Lady Selwyn," answered Walter quietly ; and thereupon she led the way into the sick-room. The first appearance of Lilian gave Walter an uncomfortable notion that he had been deceived as to her true condition ; she was not "up and dressed," as the phrase goes, it is true, but she was lying on a couch by the open window, attired in a dressing-gown, and looking more like a convalescent than one who had so recently been reported as dangerously ill. The hand which she stretched out to him, indeed, was so thin as to be almost transparent ; and the voice with which she welcomed him was almost as weak as that which had murmured his name when they parted in Joanna's cavern ; but, instead of the spot of scarlet that had then burnt upon her pallid cheeks, there was now a rose-pink blush, which was certainly not the flush of fever, though it might have been summoned there by his coming.

"This is better than when we met each other last, Walter," said she, with a sweet smile.

"It is indeed, darling." He could say no more, since the truth was not to be said.

"I long to hear how you got away from that dreadful place, but they say you must not tell me now." The tears, from the mere consciousness of her weakness, stood in her soft eyes, which also brimmed with love and tenderness. "But one

thing you must tell me—about dear papa. When shall I see him, when will he be here ?”

Walter hesitated. Should he tell her a lie with his dying lips ? or the truth, that must needs kill her ?

“You have forgotten, my dear Lily, that the ransom has not been paid,” interposed Lotty gently.

“But why is this long delay ? How cruel it is to keep poor papa in captivity ! He must have been days and days, though I know not how long. Do, dear Walter, hasten it.”

“I have done what I can, dearest.”

“And you are still doing your best, I am sure. But what is the obstacle ?”

“The sum is so very large,” said Walter, scarce knowing what words he spoke ; it was so pitiful to hear her, so pained with even what she knew, so ignorant of what must needs give her so much greater pain.

“Nay, but surely the bank can raise it. What papa wrote was surely sufficient. I kept it next my heart, as though it had been a letter of your own, Walter.”

Walter turned his eyes involuntarily towards Lotty, with a mute : “You hear *that* ?” but her gaze was fixed upon the floor. If she did not know that her husband had possessed himself of the authorisation, he felt sure that she suspected it.

“Is it possible that they refuse to pay it ?” inquired Lilian, raising herself, in her agitation, upon her elbow, then instantly sinking back again through sheer exhaustion. If, when Walter had first entered the room, a hope had risen in his breast that Lilian herself might be made the means of saving two doomed lives, it here fell to rise no more. If he could have seen her earlier, and brought the banker to her bedside, something might perhaps have been accomplished ; but, as it was, he felt all was over. It was manifest that the little strength she had, had been already expended in saying those few words. There was nothing for it but to leave her to the short-lived bliss of ignorance.

“The bankers do not refuse to pay it, Lilian, but—but we must have patience.”

“Poor, dear papa !” sighed Lilian, so softly, that none but a lover’s ear could have caught the sound. “How wretched he

must be among those terrible men ! O Walter, when shall we see him ? ”

“ I shall see him to-day, Lilian,” answered Walter solemnly.

“ To-day ! ”—with a slight flush of joy—“ that is well indeed. You need not have been afraid to tell me such good tidings. It is bad news, not good, that kills one.”

Walter’s heart sank low within him at these terrible words ; still, he made shift to smile upon her.

“ Tell him, with my dearest love,” she went on to say, “ how I long to see him, and to clasp him in my arms ! And tell him that if anything could add to the happiness of such a moment, it will be the thought that you have brought him to me. He will not—he will not wish to keep us asunder now, Walter ! ”

Then she closed her eyes, and Lotty made a sign to him that he should withdraw.

Walter bent down, and took his last kiss of Lilian ; a faint smile played upon her pale lips as he did so, but they did not part even for a word of farewell ; and his bursting heart felt grateful that they did not. He could not have answered her “ good-bye ” with firmness.

Lotty left the room with him, and, as those who watch the sick are wont to do when their invalid has a visitor, inquired of him what he thought of Lilian. “ Is she better than you expected, Mr. Litton ? ”

“ She is better than I was led to expect,” answered Walter, coldly.

Lottie’s cheek turned a shade whiter, as she observed, without reference to this reply : “ Yet she is still so weak, that a breath would blow her away.”

“ Yes ; a breath of ill-news. You heard what she said just now. That news will come to-morrow, and then Sir Reginald will have the blood of three innocent persons, instead of two, to answer for.”

“ O sir, be pitiful ! ” cried Lottie, trembling.

“ What ! pitiful to the man who stole that authorisation from yonder sick girl—plucked the father’s life from the daughter’s bosom ! Pitiful to the man who has lied to me about Lilian’s health—painting her as out of her mind, lest I should question

her, and prove him thief, or use her services to save the doomed ! Pitiful to the man ——”

“No, Mr. Litton—not to the man ; I cannot ask it ; but to the woman ! Pity *me*, who am his wife.”

“I do, I do.” The pleading misery of her tearful eyes had quenched his rage. If she had had any hand in deceiving him, it was an unwilling hand, nor had she been thoroughly persuaded of the peril in which her father stood.

“I pity you, Lady Selwyn, from my heart ; and if—if I should never see your face again——”

“Oh, Mr. Litton !” she interrupted, “then you cannot forgive me ?”

“Yes, I forgive you. A time will come, and soon, when it will be a comfort to you to know as much. Keep all news that comes to-morrow from Lilian’s ears, from Lilian’s eyes, I charge you. Play the hypocrite with her, for my sake, and for your father’s sake.”

“I can do that,” said Lottie, bitterly, “Heaven knows, I am used to that.”

Perhaps Walter was wrong to think that at that moment he of all human creatures was the most wretched ; yet, with Lottie, wretchedness was but a cloud which passes.

“And shall you really see dear papa to-day ?” she went on eagerly.

“Yes ; to-day.”

“Then you will give him my love too, with Lilian’s, and tell him nothing—nothing—that——”

“Nothing that will make one daughter less dear to him than the other, Lady Selwyn, you may be sure.”

“God bless you, for that, Walter.”

“And God bless *you*, Lottie, that should have been my sister. Farewell—farewell !”

The hand she held out to him was carried to his lips, then he turned and went down-stairs, with the slow step that bears a heavy heart. He had seen the last English face, save one, that he should ever see—that one which would meet his own with hopeless agony depicted on it. He saw it even then, even while the morning-tide of men was setting in around him, with looks of pleasure or of business, and with thoughts for the morrow, and the next day, and for a year to come ; he saw it,

in its woe and disappointment, reflected in the clear wave on the clear sky ; he was with it in that camp among the mountains, before he had left the city walls behind him, and was a captive once again, before his time.

Francisco brought him his breakfast, but asked no question concerning his recent visit to the hotel, an omission which, to judge by the earnest look with which he regarded his father's lodger, whenever Walter's eye was not upon him, was certainly not owing to any want of personal interest.

"Has Signor Litton any plans for the day?" he inquired, presently.

"Plans for the day?" repeated Walter, whose mind was so occupied with the thought of what the day had in store for him, that he did not readily understand the question.

"I mean," exclaimed Francisco, "will you not have a sail in the bay, signor, such as used to please you? There is a pleasant breeze afloat, though none on shore; and we can have the old boat, or, for that matter, the signora would, doubtless, let you have the yacht itself; it has lain idle these many days, and will do so, I suppose, till Milord Brown's ransom is paid."

"I suppose so," answered Walter, mechanically. There is something in his face which seemed to convince Francisco that questioning would be of no avail, for immediately afterwards he withdrew.

Walter lit his pipe, as he was always wont to do after the morning meal, and sat at his window until the hour of noon; then he took a last look around the room, saw that the letters and two little packets of money were in a place where they could easily be found, and left the house, walking slowly along the Marina, eastward. Every step he took was away from the habitations of his fellow-men, and was, as it were, an act of farewell to them. We are wont, and justly, to give honour to those who volunteered to lead "forlorn-hopes," and put their lives in extreme peril from shot and steel; but such heroes have at least companions in their noble act, and the excitement of battle, fought under the eyes of their comrades; moreover, though the risk of life is great, there is a secret hope in each man's heart that he may return alive. Now, Walter Litton was alone; only one man in all Palermo—and he an enemy—was cognisant of the sacrifice he was about to make; and death

was certain. He had already got within a hundred yards of the end of the Marina, when he heard footsteps, quick and heavy, coming behind him, and then his own name called out in English: "Litton—Walter Litton." He turned round, with cold surprise (for he knew the voice), and beheld Reginald Selwyn. He thought that this man had discovered his interview with Lilian, and was about to seek a quarrel with him, though Sir Reginald's face, albeit it was very grave and unwontedly pale, showed, in truth, no signs of anger.

"What is it that you want with me, Sir?" said Walter slowly.

"I want you not to be a fool, Litton," answered the other frankly. "I have been thinking over what you told me you had made up your mind to do, in case the extravagant demands of these villains were not complied with, and though I did not believe you then, I believe you now. It seems to me that you are mad enough for anything."

"I am not mad, sir; though, thanks to you, my lot is a very unhappy one."

"But it need not be so, if you will only listen to reason. It cannot, surely, be your purpose, out of a quixotic sense of honour, to give yourself up to these rascals, that they may take your life?"

"I intend so keep my word, Sir Reginald Selwyn."

"In other words, you intend to commit suicide."

"No, sir; it is you and Corralli who will, between you, have murdered me. Some touch of tenderness, born of ancient friendship, may have moved you to urge me thus; if so, let it move you no further. There is time—though there is hardly time—even yet to repent of your baseness, and to procure your father-in-law's ransom. By that means you will save both our lives; but otherwise the blood of both will be on your head; I call heaven to witness it."

"That is all rubbish, Litton. I cannot consent to be a party to any arrangement with thieves and robbers, such as you propose."

"You mean, you will not."

"Well, if you choose to take it that way, I will not."

"Then your refusal is our death-doom, and you know it."

"And your departing thus will be Lilian's death-doom,"

returned Sir Reginald, "when she comes to know what has happened. If I was the scoundrel that you pretend to believe me, I would say 'Go;' for Lilian will die, if you do so, and my wife will, of course, inherit her money. But, on the contrary, I intreat you not to go. Only think of the chances you are throwing away. It is true that hitherto I have done my best to oppose your marriage with my sister-in-law; but I will oppose it no longer."

"And your father-in-law having been put to death—you would add—there will be no other obstacle to it."

"Well, of course, if anything happens to Mr. Brown—mind, I don't say it will—I don't believe it will ——"

"You lie!" interrupted Walter sternly. "You know that death will happen to him, even better than you know it will happen to me. But you wish not to be alone in your villainy; you would bribe me into being your confederate, to keep silence, and to share your guilty gains. You are baser and viler even than I thought. To-morrow, you will be known for what you are; but if you dare to tempt me any more, you shall be known to-day. There is some one coming this way; if you do not leave me, I swear I will tell him what you have done, be he who he may. Begone, I say!"

The approaching footsteps were now drawing very near, yet Sir Reginald still hesitated. "I have striven to save you, Walter Litton," he said hoarsely.

"Yes, to shame and infamy; I refuse to be saved upon such terms. It is hard to die, but I prefer the death that is awaiting me, to the life that awaits you, Reginald Selwyn."

As Walter pronounced the name in a loud voice. Sir Reginald pushed his straw hat over his eyes, and turned upon his heel, only just in time to avoid Francisco, who came up, panting for breath. He had been running, which Walter had never known him to do before.

"Oh, Signor Litton, what is it that you are doing?"

"I am taking a walk on the Marina, Francisco," returned Walter, forcing a smile.

"But afterwards?"

"Well, afterwards, when I get to the wall yonder, I shall strike across into the country. Did you suppose I was going to throw myself into the sea?"

"No, signor; but you are about to do something as bad, or worse. Why have you left that money behind you, for me and Julia, as though we were never to see you more—and worse, for your own burial in the cemetery?"

"It is always best to provide against the worst, Francisco; then, whatever happens, the mind is calm. I did not know you would visit my room so quickly; but since you have done so, you may take the letters you have found there to their destinations: one to the English consul, and the other to Lady Selwyn."

"But none to her sister? Ah! that alone gave me hope, for you would surely have written to the signora," said he, "had you intended never to return."

"Most certainly, I should, my lad." Walter had enclosed his letter to Lilian in a note to Lotty, begging her not to deliver it until the former had regained her strength.

"Hush!" whispered Francisco. "Listen!"

From the trees which fringed the road upon the landward side, there had come a sound which Walter understood only too well; Santoro was becoming impatient.

"Santa Rosalia! that is the brigand call, signor."

"I know it, Francisco; and I must needs obey it. Farewell! and Heaven be with you."

The next moment Walter had sprung over the wall, and disappeared. Francisco uttered a cry of despair, and fled back at full speed towards the city.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE PROMISE KEPT.

"**W**E must make good speed, signor," said Santoro, who was in waiting for Walter behind the wall. "That young fellow whom you have just parted from was the same who was watching us last evening at the cemetery. I am much mistaken if the troops are not sent out after us immediately, and it is possible that this time they may know where to find us."

He was referring, of course, to Corrralli's camp, which, in that case, would have to shift its quarters, and the observation struck poor Walter as cool and selfish enough under the circumstances in which he was placed. He neither expected nor desired praise for the voluntary sacrifice of liberty and life that he was about to make, but that it should be thus altogether ignored, filled him with disgust. The fact was, however, that Santoro's intelligence was not sufficiently high to understand that the position of the young Englishman was altogether different from what that of one of his own fellow-countrymen would have been in similar straits. Had a Sicilian been suffered to escape Corrralli's hands on similar conditions, he might also have fulfilled them—but upon compulsion; his wife, his children, his friends, would have all been held responsible for his breach of faith, and a terrible retribution would have been exacted from them. Yet even Santoro had a soft spot in his heart, as was presently made manifest. They had passed on their way for some time in silence, and having crossed the main road, were about to ascend the lower slopes of the mountain, when he thus addressed the companion who had once more become his prisoner: "I suppose, signor, you would never consent to become a brigand?"

"A brigand? Well, I have never considered the matter. Santoro, but I honestly tell you that I don't think it would suit me."

"Ah, the damp and the cold, no doubt, are unpleasant, and especially when there is not food enough to make one indifferent to them; still, it is better to shiver a little, and even to want food and drink, than to die, signor."

"Doubtless, Santoro," answered Walter, unable to restrain a smile at his companion's simplicity and want of morals. "But there would be also other objections; and, besides, no one has offered me the alternative."

"Ah, but there is one who might do so. Look, signor, I have no desire to kill you, like some of those up yonder; on the contrary, I would have you live. You are brave, or you would not have smiled just now—you are strong and active; you would make as good a brigand as the best of us. Why not marry the signora?"

"Marry the signora!" For the moment, Walter did not understand to whom his companion was alluding, for there was but one woman to whom his thoughts reverted—she who in a few days would be mourning for his death, bereaved of love, almost ere love was born.

"Yes, marry the Signora Joanna. She adores you, Signor Litton, for Lavocca told me as much. Only consider the matter. We could both—that is, you and I—be married at the same time; then with our wives, and the two other men, we should form a separate band, independent of that scoundrel Corbara, though, of course, we should be under orders as respects Corrali."

The crudity and childishness of this design were such as once more to try Walter's gravity, but he answered seriously enough: "My good friend, such a plan would be impossible under any circumstances."

"What! you would rather die than marry a pretty woman?"

"I did not say that; but I would certainly rather die than accept such conditions of existence as those you have proposed to me."

Santoro looked at his prisoner with amazement. "Well you Englishmen are strange folks. I daresay you would not marry my Lavocca herself?"

"Indeed, if it were upon the same terms, I should be obliged to decline even that honour."

"Come on!" cried Santoro, with a gesture of impatience

and disgust, as he started up the hillside at the swing-trot peculiar to his class ; nor did he utter another word for hours.

Walter was well aware that the proposition that had been made to him could never have originated with his companion, but had been most likely suggested to him by Lavocca, who might certainly be supposed to know the inclinations of her mistress. On the other hand, he did not believe that the latter had authorised her to make it. Joanna, though ignorant and impulsive, had, he felt, an intelligence much too acute to entertain such an idea with seriousness. That she was in love with him, however, was certain, and in that love, he felt, lay his only hope—if hope there yet might be. She had already shewn her good-will towards him ; but in effecting what she had, had also shewn the limits of her power. After a long climb in silence, they came to an open space, the apex of a spur of the mountain, from which there was a magnificent view.

"By Heaven, there they are !" exclaimed Santoro suddenly.

Walter's heart beat fast as he heard him ; he thought that they had already come within sight of those who were about to be his assassins. But the brigand's eyes were fixed upon the place from which they had ascended, on the main road, through which was passing a long column of troops ; while in advance, and to eastward of the hill on which they stood, was a cloud of dust, with the sunlight glinting through it upon lance and helmet. It seemed to Walter as unreasonable that cavalry should be sent after them, as though a ship of war had been despatched on such a service, and he said so.

"Their object is," explained Santoro, "to surround us altogether, before proceeding to attack the camp, the position of which, it seems, has been discovered. The government is making a great effort for the English milord, but it will not be to his advantage. If Corrali has caught sight of the soldiers, it is ten to one that it will have gone hard with your friend already."

"But surely he will have kept his word with me, as I with him ; he gave us until eight o'clock to-night."

For the moment, it struck Walter that if what Santoro said were true, and violence had been already offered to the unhappy merchant, he himself was under no obligation to keep his bargain ; and what could be easier than to run down the hill and

join the soldiers! The thought had hardly crossed his brain, when the execution of it was rendered impossible, by the appearance of two men with guns, who seemed to spring out of the earth, and interposed themselves between him and the road to liberty. It was evident that they had been lying in ambush, and that he had unconsciously passed by them on the way. Of all faces that could meet his own at such a time, those of these two men were the most hateful and unwelcome, for the new-comers were Corbara and his creature, Canelli.

"Welcome, signor," said the former sardonically, and lifting his battered wide-awake in mock salutation—"welcome, though I see you come empty-handed. It seems to me that you were half repenting of having returned to us."

"Come, come, let us be fair," put in Santoro good-naturedly; "the signor has kept his word, and we have no right to complain."

"No right to complain, when he has let loose those dogs upon us!" and the speaker pointed towards the soldiers. "They are pouring in, it seems, from every point in the compass; and yet, if they poured from the sky itself, they would not save you, Mr. Englishman."

"No, no; they will not save him," echoed Canelli grimly. "If they kill us, we will have our fun first, lieutenant; will we not?"

"There, hark to the young bloodhound!" continued Corbara, laughing. "He was not so fortunate in winning the signora's money from the rest of us as he expected to be, and that has rather put him out. Has it not?"

"There are others, at all events, less in luck than I am," answered the young brigand, looking at Walter menacingly, and fingering the knife in his girdle. "They have not waited for eight o'clock with the old fellow up yonder, and why should we be more particular with this one?"

"Stand off?" cried Santoro sternly, "and keep your hands to yourself, or I will let daylight through you. I am answerable to the captain for my prisoner here, and you had better not interfere with him."

"Well, he will not give you much trouble after he gets up yonder," observed Corbara brutally; "only, let us be all there before the play begins, remember; that's only fair." With that

they parted, the two brigands moving down the hill, while Walter with his guard continued their ascent.

"Santoro," said he suddenly, "will you do me one favour before I die?"

"Very readily, signor," answered the other, not without a touch of feeling in his tone. "What is it you would ask of me?"

"Only the loan of your knife."

"No, no; don't think of that yet, signor. If you will be guided by me, things may not be so bad with you even yet. It is always time enough to kill one's self."

"Not always, Santoro. Did you not hear what was just said to me?"

"Yes; but that fellow yonder is not everybody. Since you have come back like this, like a man of honour, and since, above all, Joanna loves you, you will not be tortured. She would never stand by and see it done."

"In that case, I shall not need your knife; but against the other chance, I entreat you to lend it me, Santoro."

"Will you promise not to use it against any of our own people—except Corbara? for if you have a fancy that way, I would not balk it. I can believe your word, I know."

"Yes, Santoro; I promise that."

"Then here is the knife."

Walter took it, and hid it in his breast. He had a surety now that death would be the worst that he could meet with. Hardly had he concealed the weapon, ere Colletta and another brigand emerged from the trees in front of them.

"Ha! you have come back, then, without the money!" cried Colletta the silent, looking at Walter with sullen disfavour.

"The signor is quite as sorry for that as you can be," answered Santoro: "he has done his best, and failed."

"His best will be the worst for him," replied the other. "The captain is out of his mind with rage because of the troops being sent out again; and since he never thought to see this young gentleman again, and, moreover, was indebted to him for their reappearance, he has been taking it out of the old one."

"Do you mean to say he has murdered my poor friend?" ejaculated Walter with horror. He had heretofore tried to per-

suade himself that what Corbara had said about the merchant was a falsehood invented to give him pain.

"O dear, no ; that would have been letting him off much too easily," answered Colletta coolly. "He only hung him up by one arm for an hour or so, with his toes touching the ground. The captain could hardly keep his knife out of the old scoundrel when he saw the troops instead of the ransom, and is gone down the mountain to cool himself by letting some blood."

"And who is in command up yonder ?" inquired Santoro carelessly.

"The Signora ! There are not half-a-dozen altogether ; Corrali has sent out the rest of us in pairs, to let the soldiers know that brigands have teeth."

The meaning glance which Santoro here cast at Walter fell upon barren ground ; the young fellow's heart was full of pity for the unfortunate merchant, and it was one grain of solace to him at that moment to think that his reappearance would not be so bitter a disappointment to the captive as he had feared it would be. Mr. Brown must already be aware that all hopes of procuring the ransom were at an end.

The two brigands left them as their fellows had done, to take part in the blood-letting (of others), which Corrali had found necessary for his system, or his temper ; while Walter and his companion pushed on so quickly that before sunset, and therefore considerably in advance of the time appointed for their return, they presented themselves at the brigand camp. At the sight of them, a murmur of sullen satisfaction broke forth from its inmates, very different from the extravagance of feeling commonly displayed among them ; and Joanna herself came forward to meet them with grave face.

"I ought not to say I am glad to see you, Signor Litton," said she in a low tone ; "yet I can hardly be sorry that you have redeemed your word ; I knew you would justify my confidence in it, though my brother scoffed at the idea, and has gone down yonder in the conviction that we should not see you."

"He was wrong, signora ; I am come back as I promised—to my death. All the favour I have to ask of him is, to let it be a quick one."

"Do not speak of that just yet, Signor Litton," answered she in a faltering voice; "the time is not yet arrived."

"I know it; and yet, before that time, as your people have informed me, some cruelty has been perpetrated upon my unhappy friend, contrary to Corrali's promise."

"I could not help it," replied Joanna pleadingly; "the sight of the troops put my brother beside himself with fury, and when he is here, I am powerless."

"But when he is *not* here?"

"Well, I can then do something, perhaps; and you may be sure," added she tenderly, "that all the power I have shall be at your service."

"I would wish, then, to speak with Mr. Brown at once."

A look of disappointment passed over Joanna's face; she had evidently anticipated some request upon his own account; but she bent her head in acquiescence, and Walter moved on without hindrance to the spot which his fellow-captive usually occupied. He found the old merchant sitting on the ground, and guarded by two men who had joined the band with Joanna. As Walter drew nigh, he lifted up a pale and haggard face, that shewed such signs of pain as mental agony alone but rarely produces, and a sad smile lit up his features. "What! Walter, my lad, have you come back?" he murmured.

"Yes, my friend, did I not promise to do so?"

"Ah, yes; but I thought human nature would have been too strong for you. However, if they are not brute beasts, they will surely not treat you with such cruelty as they have treated me. I know now what it is to wish to die." A groan here escaped from the old man's heart that would have moved any heart save that of a brigand.

"They shall never torture more," whispered Walter: "I have a knife here, which I am about to drop into your pocket. In the last extremity, you will know what to do with it."

"And you, Walter?" hesitated Mr. Brown, as he grasped the weapon.

"I shall take my chance. There are two hours yet before—before they will do us any hurt, unless Corrali should return. And while there is life there is hope."

The old man shook his head. "Nothing but a miracle could save us," answered he; "it is all over."

Walter had taken the precaution to bring with him a flask of brandy, and he now offered it to his companion, who put it greedily to his lips. The effect was instantaneous: the flame of life once more sprang up in its socket; and the familiar thoughts that had been numbed within him by despair were set free, and took their accustomed channel. "How is Lilian, Walter?"

"She is weak and wan, sir, but no longer suffering. She has been very, very ill, unhappily for us all; but I think she is on the road to health. She sent her dearest love, as Lady Selwyn, did; but neither are as yet aware of our sad strait."

"That is well, since nothing can be done. Give me another drink, lad. How was it, Walter, that the payment of the ransom went amiss? Surely Gordon ——"

"It was not Gordon, sir; it was Sir Reginald." And then in a few words he told him what had occurred.

The old merchant listened in silence, save for an interjection or two of indignation and abhorrence. "I had thought," said he quietly, when all was finished, "that there were no men in the world so wicked as these brigands, but it seems I was mistaken. Let us not sully our last thoughts by suffering them to dwell on such a villain."

But, nevertheless, he could not divert them from the topic, but again and again reproached himself with his own blindness to the baronet's true character, and always contrasting it with that of Walter. At any other time, such comparisons would have been embarrassing, but the fact was Walter scarcely heard them, his own reflections, unstimulated by the fiery liquor which had made his companion garrulous, were running in a far deeper groove.

The sun had set, and it was near the hour which had been appointed as the limit of Walter's return, when he was roused from his meditations by Santoro.

"Signor Litton," said the brigand in low but earnest tones, "the signora would speak to you."

"Do not leave me, Walter!" exclaimed the old merchant piteously. "They are going to put us to death; but at least let us die together."

"Nothing will happen to either of you," said Santoro, in an-

swer to this appeal, the sense of which, if not the words, it was easy to understand, "until the captain returns."

"And then?" inquired Walter.

"Then you will die, and milord here will begin to die."

Walter answered nothing, for he was sick at heart; but with a face composed and calm, arose, and followed Santoro into Joanna's presence.

CHAPTER XLV.

LEAP-YEAR.

IT was already dusk as Walter and Santoro crossed the camp, and where the few trees grew, the light was so feeble that faces could scarcely be discerned ; it was more, therefore, by the stature of Joanna than by her looks that Walter recognised the sister of the brigand chief, as she received him standing in the shadow of some beech trees. Santoro, in obedience to a gesture from his mistress, had at once withdrawn, and they were quite alone.

"I have sent for you, Signor Litton," said she, in a strange and trembling voice, "to say what it does not become a woman's lips to say, though it delights her ear to listen to it. The peril in which you stand, the imminence of it, and—and—something in my own heart, must plead as my excuse : I love you ! "

The fact was not certainly unknown to Walter ; but the confession of it, made thus abruptly, and under such abnormal circumstances, astounded him—perhaps with that amazement with which an English marriage service credits young persons of the opposite sex. Having heard thus much, he did not doubt that the proposition hinted at by Santoro—that he should save his life by wedding Joanna, while at the same time adopting her profession—was about to be made to him.

"Joanna ——" he began.

"Pray, let me finish ere you answer me," interrupted she, in the same trembling tones, but with an earnest pleading in them that gave them force. "It cannot be but that you scorn me at the outset, but I can bear your scorn, since it is for your own sake that I provoke it. From the first instant that I saw you, I became your prisoner, though you were mine ; my woman's heart acknowledged you its lord ; the courage you have shown, the honour you have exhibited, it took for granted without trial. I should have known them, had I died that

moment, as well as now, when they have been proved so gallantly, and at so great a sacrifice. When I showed you the secret of our cavern, and bade you depart, if it so pleased you, it was but a girl's artifice to show her trust, for I felt that I ran no risk of losing you that way ; and later, when I became, as it were, bail for your returning hither, though it pained me to see you go, I knew you would return and redeem your promise, as certainly as I know it to-day. O signor, what was it but love that told me so ! Here, in my bosom, I keep the picture that you drew of my poor self ; but nearer yet, and within my heart, is your own image, and will remain there to my dying day, though that indeed will be soon, if you die. Oh, why "—here her voice grew passionately earnest, though her tone was little above a whisper—"should we speak of death, we two, when it can be averted from us both !"

"I see not how, Joanna," answered Walter, gravely.

"Ah, but I can show you how. For your sake, I am content to give up—it is not much, you will say, but it is all I have—my place among my people, and its power ; to exchange this free air and untrammelled life, for an existence that must needs seem cramped and submissive ; my native land for yours ; if only you will let me call you mine ! Oh, do not scorn such love !"

She stopped for an instant, overcome with emotion, and Walter said : "I do not scorn it, Joanna."

"I thank you, signor, even for that much of kindness," continued she submissively. "I pray you hear me out. Corrali, look you, though he is black in your eyes, is my brother, dear to me as the only kin I have, and who has avenged my wrongs ; yet, to wed you, I will desert him, returning evil for good. I have no bent for this dishonest life ; my hand is free from blood, and it is yours if you will but please to accept it. I cannot flatter myself, alas ! that you would do so, if you were free to choose, but since it holds your life in it, signor, my love may help to make it worth your taking."

During the latter part of Joanna's appeal, the passionate eloquence with which she had at one time urged it had quite failed her, though the plaintive tenderness still lingered. Doubtless she read in Walter's face not only that her love was unreturned, but that it could never be so. Or perhaps the

humiliation of having to offer so huge a bribe, for what she would have fain obtained without the asking, quenched all her natural fire. This despondent pleading, however, by no means lost her ground with him to whom it was addressed. Walter had, it is true, no love to give her; but he had pity, which is said to be akin to it; and gratitude, which tends towards it; while, above all, the natural desire for life—life almost at any price—was pulling at his heart-strings. If he should promise to wed Joanna, he would hardly be forsworn, since to the girl he would have wed he was already dead—or would be so in a few hours; marriage with Lilian was an impossibility; then why not save his life, by marriage with Joanna? Men marry every day without affection, to gain much less; nor in his case—a mere Bohemian without kith or kin—were the social objections to such a union—stupendous as they would have been with some men—by any means unsurmountable. The only member of society who was likely to have any voice in the matter—namely, Jack Pelter, would probably hail with enthusiasm the addition of a female brigand chief to the *ménage* in Beech Street; or regard her at worst as a gratis model of the Salvator Rosa class, and an admirable addition to the establishment. These thoughts, practical and even humorous, flashed upon Walter's brain, in spite of himself, though death was hovering over him, and genuine if misdirected love was demanding a final answer to its appeal. But they came and went in a second of time, and left him calm and steadfast. As to purchasing his personal safety at this price, or any price, that, had it stood alone, would have been his own affair, to be settled with his own conscience. He was not so quixotic as to hold Lilian's love as plighted troth, when death itself had put in, as it were, a priority of claim to him; in any case, he could not be Lilian's, and therefore it was unreasonable that he should accuse himself of faithlessness in wedding another. But there was a feature in this case which made it easy indeed for him to come to a just decision. How was it possible for him to return to Palermo a free man with such news as he would have to bring with him? Could he tell Lilian that he had saved his life, on the condition of marrying Joanna, but had left her father to perish by unheard-of tortures at the hands of men made still more furious by his own escape? Would not the

twofold woe be her death-doom, and the life he had thus basely purchased for himself, become intolerable, from shame, as that of Sir Reginald himself? He had not the shadow of a doubt of it, and therefore no hesitation as to what it became him to reply.

"Joanna," said he, "so far from scorning the love which you offer me at so great a sacrifice to yourself, I am deeply sensible of it, and thank you for it with all my heart; but the last words spoken by yonder unhappy man: 'Do not leave me, Walter,' and which are still ringing in my ears, have greater force than even those which promise me life and liberty. I cannot accept these gifts, for they would be worthless to me, since they would have been purchased by the desertion of my friend."

For a full minute Joanna was silent; then she took a step towards him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Walter," she said, "rather than lose you I will save your friend. It will be difficult, and very dangerous, but I will do my best to do it. I had promised to desert my brother, though you will not desert this man, who is not even of your blood; but I will do yet more—I will play Corralli false, and rob him of what he holds to be his just revenge. For your sake, and to win you for my own, I will become a traitress. This very night—nay, within this very hour, for we have no time to lose—I will place you both in safety, if you will pass your word to be my husband. Oh, what can woman's love give more? Hark!"

Through the stillness of the night was heard the firing of musket-shots at a great distance. "Yonder Corralli speaks. He will be up here shortly, wild with rage and loss. No power of mine will then avail to save you. Quick, quick! give me your Word."

Again a torrent of contending thoughts swept through Walter's brain. The circumstances in which he was now placed had become strangely altered. If Joanna could carry out her present offer, Lilian would lose indeed her lover (though not, alas, his love), but she would at least have left to her her father. It would be no longer for his own sake, but for hers, that he would become another's. His hand he could not offer her, but in its place he would give her her father's life.

Again was heard a dropping fire of musketry, but the sound

was more distinct. The combatants were evidently coming nearer.

"Walter, your hand?" whispered Joanna eagerly; "in a few minutes more it may be too late."

"I give it you, Joanna. If you will save the old man's life, I promise to make you my wife."

Never surely was betrothal made under circumstances so ill-assorted and inapt; nor was there one moment to spare for its tender ratification.

"Santoro, Colletta," cried Joanna in loud and commanding tones, "let both the prisoners be fast secured."

This was done at once, with ropes that bit into their arms; and helpless as infants, Walter and Mr. Brown were placed side by side upon the ground. The brigands crowded round them with wrathful and excited looks, which the noise of the firing had doubtless evoked; they imagined that vengeance was already to be taken upon their wretched captives.

"Corralli is beset down yonder," exclaimed Joanna, "and we must send him succour. Now these men are bound, we women are their masters, and can be left to guard them. Let each take his musket and do his part; and when it is done, you will find us here in charge."

There was an instant of hesitation, but used to the habit of obedience, the men moved to where the arms were piled, and each one took his weapon. Santoro alone remained standing beside the women.

"Get you gone, Santoro; it is you who will be in command till you join my brother," said Joanna imperiously.

"No, signora; I remain here at all hazards," answered he in low significant tones.

"You disobey, then, my express orders?"

"For the present, signora, yes. I venture to think the captain would wish the prisoners to be left with a stronger guard than yourself and Lavocca."

"If you remain, you will do so at your peril."

"That I quite understand, signora. Corralli will decide when he comes up the hill again as to which of us was in the right."

By this time the band were ready to march, and, in their presence, all controversy was to one, at least, of the disputants out of the question.

"You will obey Colletta, men, till you fall in with the captain," said Joanna steadily; "upon second thoughts, I will keep Santoro to guard the camp."

"Good!" exclaimed Colletta, who was well content to find himself in the unwonted position of commander. "There is no knowing what prisoners may not be up to. Now, then, my fine fellows, step out." And off started the brigands at their "double," which was a run about twice as fast as that used by regular soldiers, and, of course, without the least pretence of order, which, indeed, the nature of the ground would itself have rendered impossible. Santoro watched them disappear, then with a grim smile turned round upon Joanna: "It was well schemed, signora; but I am not quite such a fool as Lavocca has doubtless represented me to be."

"On the contrary, Lavocca has always spoken well of you in that respect. 'You have plenty of wits,' she says, 'but, unfortunately, no heart.'"

"No heart? I, who love her with all my soul, and would lay down my life for her!"

"Oh, she has heard you say that, doubtless, perhaps a thousand times. But when it comes to the proof of your affection, then it is that you are found wanting."

"Begging your pardon, signora," answered the brigand, reddening, "and with all due submission to you as Corrali's sister, you are speaking what is not the truth."

"You talk of submission, and yet you remain here in defiance of my orders!" returned Joanna contemptuously. "You talk of love, and yet it was Lavocca's wish, as well as my own, that we should be left alone here!"

"Ay; to let those birds yonder out of the cage, or, at all events, the one that, to your ear, seems to sing so sweetly. You would doubtless find your own account in such a plan, signora; but what advantage would it be to Lavocca, who would only share the transgression and the punishment?"

"It is love, then, and not duty, that keeps you here, Santoro?"

"It is both, signora," answered the brigand, smiling, for, at a sign from her mistress, her companion drew near, whose presence to his rugged nature was as the sun that draws from

a barren soil, unlooked-for signs of graciousness and fertility: "it is duty to yourself, and love for Lavocca."

"Then what I have now to ask of you, Santoro, will be easy to grant," continued Joanna. "It is my intention to set loose these captives, and lead them to Palermo. You may oppose it, of course, but it will be at the loss of one of our two lives; and if you should kill me, you will not find it easy, I think, to win Lavocca——"

"I would not marry him, if he did, though there was not another man in the world," interposed Lavocca resolutely; "I would even rather marry Corbara."

"She would marry Corbara!" exclaimed Santoro, lifting up his hands, as if in appeal to universal nature against an idea so monstrous.

"But, on the other hand," continued Joanna, "if you will come into our plans, and assist us to escape, Lavocca will marry you as soon as we set foot in the city. A free pardon will easily be obtained for us, in consideration of this service to the Englishmen——"

"And your brother would flay us alive before the week was out," interrupted Santoro.

"If he caught us; I don't doubt that in the least," answered Joanna. "But milord yonder will place you on board his yacht, and you will never leave it, until you and your wife are landed in England, where he will provide for you handsomely. Of course, there will be danger in getting down the mountain but if you will not run some risk to win Lavocca, you, who were talking about laying down your life for her——"

She did not finish the sentence, because Lavocca had with the most opportune judgment precipitated herself into her lover's arms, and he was covering her comely face with kisses: the noise they made, however, was so very slight, that Joanna felt justified in taking it for the silence that gives consent. "Come, come," said she; "you will have leisure enough for that to-morrow. You must earn your reward, Santoro, before enjoying it!" Yet, nevertheless, she left the fond pair together while she flew across the camp, and with a sharp knife cut the ropes that bound the prisoners, at the same time whispering a few words into Walter's ear.

"Is it then come at last?" cried the old merchant feebly :
"is death awaiting us?"

"No ; life and freedom, if you have only the courage to take advantage of the opportunity," replied Walter. In the excitement of the moment, he had almost forgotten the price he had agreed to pay for them, and had bounded to his feet like a deer. "Give me a weapon, Joanna."

She drew a pistol from her belt, and gave it him. "Santoro yonder is on our side, dearest, and will lead us down the mountain. If we part again, it will not be your death alone that will separate us, but mine also."

He answered, not with the caress which perhaps she expected, but with a silent pressure of his hand.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE ESCAPE.

IN a few minutes the whole party had left the camp and plunged into the shadow of the trees that thickly covered the mountain, and which at that hour as effectually concealed them as though the earth had swallowed them up. The foliage, however, was intermittent ; large spaces of exposed ground had presently to be crossed, where the dusk of a Sicilian night afforded them but a scanty cloak ; and when this happened, Santoro and the two women walked in advance, that their dress might deceive the eyes of their late comrades, and cause them to be taken for a portion of the band under Colletta. They were only too likely to fall in with some of these, since it was the brigand habit when entering into action to scatter in pairs ; though, on the other hand, this might enable the fugitives to overcome opposition. Having once embraced their cause and his Lavocca, Santoro could be depended upon to fight for them, and, indeed, he had gone too far to render return to his original allegiance possible. His untiring step fell as noiselessly upon the rock as on the turf, his keen eyes roved from tree to tree with unceasing vigilance, and, though the night was cloudy and their way without a path, he never lost the true direction of their course ; only, when shots were heard, he would stop and listen, and turn to the right hand or the left, in order to avoid the combatants, from whose neighbourhood they were still, however, at a considerable distance. Three out of his four companions, albeit two were women, took step for step with his own ; but for the fourth—Mr. Christopher Brown—the whole party had not seldom to halt, while he panted for breath, or begged for a drop of water to quench his thirst. His age and constitution were but ill fitted for a night-march of such speed and duration, and, moreover, the terrors and privations of the previous fortnight had much enfeebled his frame. In his own mind, Walter felt but too sure that in case

of their having to fight their way, the poor merchant must needs succumb to adverse fate, and would never survive to enjoy that liberty which he had so loyally striven to procure for him.

They had descended about two-thirds of the mountain, and, consequently, had reached what was the most dangerous part of the journey, namely, the locality where, in all probability, the brigands' line intervened between them and the troops, when suddenly "the call" was heard very soft and low, immediately in front of them. Walter and Mr. Brown, who were just issuing from a copse into an open space, at once stepped back among the trees; but the three others, who had advanced farther, and whose appearance had doubtless evoked the signal, moved boldly on, Santoro, with admirable presence of mind, at the same time giving back the answering note. The next moment they were confronted by Corbara. Of all the band, next to Corrali himself, this man was the most to be dreaded; for not only was he a most determined and relentless ruffian, and possessed of vast physical strength, but he was especially hostile to Santoro. On the other hand, he was probably unaware of the succour sent by Joanna, and would, therefore, not be so suspicious of her presence as if he had known she had been left in charge of the prisoners; and what was also hopeful was, that he appeared to be alone. Santoro, who had already loosened his pistols in his belt, would have shot him down at once, but for fear that he might have comrades near him; and the most bitter repentance that he had ever experienced seized his soul because he had parted with his knife to Walter.

"Ha! Santoro, how comes it that you are down here?—and La Signora also!" Here he stepped back with a movement of suspicion. "What has caused you to leave the camp?"

"We are come to help my brother," answered Joanna coolly; "the firing came so quick that I felt he must be hardly pressed."

"He is only fighting because he likes it," answered Corbara gruffly; "for my part, it seems to me that there is blood enough to be spilt for the present, without losing our own in return."

This was a reference, as Joanna well understood, to the promised fate of the captives, and in her ignorance as to whether they were not even at that moment within sight of the speaker,

she felt that her presence of mind was being tried to the uttermost ; fortunately, her nerves were like her muscles, strong as steel.

"I hope there has been no loss amongst us ?" inquired she earnestly.

"As to loss of life, I don't know, though, when there are bullets singing about our ears as plentifully as birds in June, it is more than likely ; but I for one have lost blood enough."

"Well, here is she who will bind up your wound, Corbara, and give you more comfort than the best surgeon in Palermo," and Joanna signed to Lavocca to approach the lieutenant. As she did so, Santoro whispered : "Your knife, your knife !" and the young girl slipped it into his hand as she moved past him towards his rival.

"It is but a scratch in the right shoulder, my dear," said Corbara, in a tone which he intended to be tender ; "and if you have got a handkerchief—— What's that ?" A piercing cry broke from the covert from which they had just emerged, and almost at the same moment a groan from Corbara, who staggered and fell forward on his face ; a blow from Santoro's knife, struck between the shoulders, had cloven his heart in twain.

"Hark, hark !" cried Joanna ; "there is mischief behind us ; see to Signor Litton." She was herself the first to reach the spot where she had left Walter and his companion, and where were now three persons. The youth Colletta lay on the ground, felled by the butt of Walter's pistol, though not before he had uttered a cry for help, which was already answered to left and right of them ; they could even hear the noise of men forcing their way towards them through the brushwood.

"Quick, quick !" cried Santoro ; "straight down the hill every one of you." And all five ran forward together, though it seemed that such a movement must cast them into the very arms of their foes. Again and again a sheet of flame flashed out upon them, and one at least of their number toppled over. It was not Mr. Brown, Walter knew, for he was holding the old man firmly by the arm, and helping him on, as a father helps his child to keep up with his longer legs ; and it was not Joanna, for she never left his side, and at each flash seemed as though she would have interposed her own lithe form between

himself and the bullet. Thus they held on their headlong way for a considerable time, when the old merchant suddenly fell exhausted on the ground, with the last breath he had to spare bidding Walter leave him to his fate, since another yard he could not run. Then, for the first time, they missed Santoro. The noise of the firing had ceased; there were no signs of their pursuers; and the gray dawn was slowly breaking over the eastern hills. Yet self-congratulation was by no means the prevailing feeling with their little band.

"Where is he?" cried Lavocca wildly. "He was close behind me all the way, and again and again bade me be of good courage. If he has fallen into their hands, I will avenge him yet"—and the determined girl had actually begun to re-ascend the mountain, when Joanna seized her arm.

"He is not in their hands, Lavocca, but with the saints, I trust," whispered she tenderly; "I saw him leap into the air, ten minutes back, killed by a bullet through his brain."

"You saw him die, and yet you ran on? Oh, cruel, cruel!" cried the unhappy girl.

"What aid could we have given him, dear Lavocca? Would you have had us make the triumph of his murderers still greater by becoming their prisoners? His dearest wish, if he could now express it, would be that you should effect your escape. Let us now think only of obeying him, and mourn him afterwards."

Accustomed to submit in everything to Joanna's will, Lavocca was to all appearance herself again before they resumed their flight; she shed no more tears, but instead of using her former vigilance, kept her eyes fixed on the ground, as though she cared little now what fortune happened to her, and lagged somewhat behind the rest. It was a harsh blow of fate that had deprived her of the being who was so soon to have been her husband, but, as a matter of fact, she had been by no means passionately devoted to poor Santoro; the love, as in her mistress's case, had been almost wholly on one side, only in the reverse order as to sex; and, moreover, Lavocca was a coquette in her way, with no stronger feeling of any kind than that of exciting admiration. Joanna, indeed, was as much grieved as she, at their late companion's death, for she could not but be aware that she herself had been the involuntary cause of it.

But on the other hand, now that the pursuit of those whom she had such good cause to fear was over, or seemed to be so, and while the reward, for which she had fought so hard, seemed within her grasp, her heart had scarce room for grief. The dawn had broadened into daylight, and from where they stood, upon a low spur of the mountain, some portion of their city of refuge was to be seen. "See, Walter," whispered she triumphantly, as they moved side by side together; "yonder is Palermo; the troops are not far from hence; but in any case, in one hour more, you will be free, and I shall be bound only by the sweet ties of love and duty."

The words had scarce escaped her lips, when a line of fire, accompanied by a splutter of musketry, broke out from a small thicket close to the right of them, and she dropped down at his feet like a stone. When the blinding bitter smoke had rolled away, Walter, kneeling by her prostrate form, found himself surrounded by a crowd of soldiers, astonished to see the young Englishman moved to tears by the just retribution that had overtaken one of his captors. Lavocca, whom they took for a boy brigand, was bound hand and foot; and Mr. Christopher Brown was drinking brandy as though it were water, from a flask which the officer in command was holding to his lips.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"HE IS WORTH ALL LOVE CAN GIVE HIM."

JOANNA was not dead ; but she had received more than one wound, which the surgeon of the detachment pronounced to be very serious. As soon as they were bound up, and she could be moved, a litter was brought, in which she was conveyed slowly towards the town ; and beside it walked Walter and Lavocca. A brief explanation of the matter had, of course, been given by the former, and the two women at once divided the interest of their captors with those whom they had been sent out to rescue. Poor Mr. Brown, indeed, as he limped along, all draggled and torn, with anything but that smooth, starched look which distinguishes the rich citizens of London, was by no means an attractive object ; but since his pecuniary value was well understood, he did not lack attention. Altogether, the procession was a sombre one, very unlike what the return of an expedition should be which has accomplished its object. For the soldiers were aware that they had not only "encumbered with their assistance" the persons whom they had gone out to succour, but had inflicted a grievous wrong on her to whom the escape of the prisoners had been owing ; while Mr. Brown was too exhausted, and Walter too overcome with pity for his preserver, to shew any symptom of satisfaction. As she was lifted speechless into the litter, she had feebly held out her hand to him, and he had carried it to his lips, and retained it still. The soldiers thought that the young Englishman was but expressing his gratitude by so doing ; but he would have done the same, had it been an open sign of their engagement. He was too full of commiseration and thankfulness to her, to abate one jot of an exhibition of affection which evidently gave her an intense pleasure ; nor, whatever his unbidden thoughts might have been, did he permit himself to speculate upon what fortune might have in store for him should her wounds prove mortal. His whole ex-

istence was for the time devoted to her ; the remembrance of his former life, including even his late experiences while in Corrali's power, were all swept away, to make room, as it were, for the absorbing reflection that this girl had given to him her love, and had proved its genuineness by sacrificing for him all she had—even perhaps to life itself.

At a small village on their way, a mule was found, whereon Mr. Brown was lifted, which enabled him to converse as well as keep pace with his late companion.

"Walter Litton, you are henceforth my son, remember, whatever happens," were his first words, spoken with great feeling. "I mean," added he, as the young painter stared at him, half-dazed with woe and wonder, "whatever happens as respects dear Lilian."

How strange it seemed that such a communication should give him pain ; but yet it did so. He only bowed his head, by way of acknowledgment ; then turned to Joanna in terror, lest she should have understood the old man's words. Whether they referred to Lilian's state of health, or her feelings towards himself (of which he had never spoken openly to her father), he did not know, but it brought her home to his remembrance, and in so doing, seemed to do a wrong to his wounded charge.

"This young woman, to whom we owe so much," continued Mr. Brown, misunderstanding his glance, "will of course be taken to our hotel, to be tended by my daughters like a sister."

"Indeed, she deserves no less, sir," answered Walter solemnly.

Nothing more was said until they drew near the city, when Mr. Brown once more broke silence : "I wonder whether that scoundrel Selwyn will venture to look me in the face !" The old merchant's mental vigour was evidently returning to him, now that he had reached the confines of civilisation ; while Walter, who had been the leading spirit throughout their common dangers, felt, on the contrary, more perplexed and subdued with every footfall. Notwithstanding the earliness of the hour, a great crowd, upon whom Joanna's dark eyes rested without seeming to observe their presence, accompanied the procession to the hotel, where the good news had already penetrated, and on the steps of which stood the landlord, to do honour to their arrival.

"Is Sir Reginald Selwyn within?" was Mr. Brown's impatient inquiry, delivered in very disinheritory tones.

"No, sir; he left yesterday by the steamer to Messina. Her ladyship, your daughter, however, did not accompany him."

In another minute, ere he reached the head of the stairs, the old man was clasped in Lotty's arms. To his astonishment, and still more to that of Walter, Lilian herself, pale and trembling, and looking like one risen from the grave, was standing at the doorway of the sitting-room. But ere she could shape the words of welcome, her eyes fell upon the litter, as it was slowly borne up-stairs, and concluding, doubtless, that it contained Walter, sick or wounded, her feeble strength forsook her, and she would have fallen senseless on the floor, but for her father's aid. He kissed her tenderly; and then, still hugging her to his breast, observed to Lotty: "You will have two patients to nurse now, my girl, instead of one. This is a woman—though you wouldn't think so," continued he, pointing to Joanna—"and one to whom Walter and myself are indebted for our lives. And here is another young person in male attire. We have been in very queer company of late, as you will conclude; but these two are by far the best specimens of it, I do assure you."

It was quite curious to see how quickly the old merchant had recovered from his late depression, and how naturally he resumed the position of host and master, which he had occupied before his late misfortunes. Poor Lavocca, on the other hand, bereft of her lover, alarmed for the fate of her only friend, and overcome by the strangeness of the scene, so different from those of her mountain-life, looked piteous and disconsolate enough, and kissed the hand which Lotty held out to her with grateful humility.

"Now, Walter, my lad," continued Mr. Brown, "you had better go home and make yourself comfortable, while I do the like, and then come up here to breakfast, and hear the doctor's report. I have sent for the best in the place; and if money can save her, Miss Joanna shall not want for life, or anything that life can give her."

Walter would have hesitated to obey this order, for he felt that his place was by the side of the wounded girl, whom he

had promised to make his wife ; but the arrival of the surgeon, who instantly ordered the patient to be conveyed into the inner room, and the apartment to be cleared, put the matter beyond his power, and compelled him to retire to his lodgings. Here he remained in a strange state of anxiety and suspense, scarcely knowing what to hope or what to fear ; now moved with tender pity for Joanna, now filled with still more tender regrets upon Lilian's account ; and very ill inclined to listen to the congratulations with which Baccari and his son overwhelmed him, but which gratitude compelled him to acknowledge. For it was indeed to the interest which Francisco had taken in him, and the promptness with which he had acted, upon seeing him depart with Santoro, that his rescue had been due. The lad had entertained some suspicion of his not being a free agent, during those last days he had spent in Palermo, and had watched his proceedings accordingly ; had dogged him to the gate of the cemetery, and contrived to overhear the name of the locality where Corrali had pitched his camp. Then, when convinced of the young Englishman's departure and its object, he had hurried to the consul with the letter Walter had left behind him, and had also delivered that for Lilian into the hands of his mistress, her attendant. In consequence of these rapid measures, the troops had been sent out forthwith, with better information than usual as to the direction in which to march, and with orders to surround the mountain. The impatience and fury of Corrali himself had done the rest. But besides sending out the troops, the tidings thus disseminated by Francisco had roused public indignation, not only among the British residents, but with the natives themselves, against Sir Reginald ; and it was amid a storm of hisses and execrations that he had embarked on board the steamer on the previous afternoon. He had not indeed been driven to do so by the general indignation ; his natural courage would probably have been too high for that ; but after having witnessed Walter's departure, he had felt inaction insupportable. To stay in Palermo and await the news of the massacre that he could have prevented by the mere signing of his name, was something that even his iron nerves refused to face ; and therefore he had taken his place for Messina. He would willingly have carried Lotty with him, since, in her despair and wretchedness at the coming

catastrophe, she was only too likely to drop some hint that would lead to his inculpation ; but, on the other hand, to tear her away at such a time from her sick sister, was an act which would set every tongue wagging against him, and still more certainly arouse suspicion. So Sir Reginald had gone alone, to the great relief of all concerned, save the mob, who wished to duck him, and Mr. Brown, who—no longer restrained by sentiments of respect for the baronet of the United Kingdom—yearned to give him a piece of his mind.

In the midst of these details came a message from the hotel, to say that Walter's presence was required there at once ; he hurried thither, and found Lotty awaiting him in the sitting-room alone.

"I don't understand the matter at all, Mr. Litton," said she nervously. "Everything has been so strange and terrible, that it may well have done away with my poor wits ; but this poor brigand woman, it seems, is dying ; and though Lilian is most unfit to be her companion under such circumstances, she has insisted upon being with her, and now you have been sent for to see them both—alone."

Walter's heart was too full to speak ; he only bowed, and followed Lotty through the door that led into the sick-room. She ushered him within it, and then immediately withdrew, taking Julia and Lavocca with her ; and Walter found himself alone with the two women, to each of whom—but out of devotion to one of them—he had plighted his troth. Joanna, looking strangely unlike herself in feminine garb, and with features from which the near approach of death had chased every touch of harshness, and left all womanly, was lying on Lilian's couch ; while Lilian—with cheeks as pale as those of her companion, and which she in vain strove to keep free from tears—was sitting in an arm-chair by her side. She signed to him in silence to draw near Joanna.

"I have sent for you, Signor Litton," began the latter, in weak and broken tones ; when a gentle hand was suddenly placed upon her arm, and a soft voice interrupted her with : "Why not call him Walter ?" "Ah, you have a good heart," murmured the dying girl. "Yes, I will call him Walter, since it is for so short a time. Walter, I have sent for you, to bid

you farewell. The doctor tells me—though indeed I felt that it was so before he came—that I am dying. It is better that this should be, even on my own account, for what had I to live for save a love that could never be returned ; and upon yours, how much better, since it will set you free.”

Walter's eyes were fixed upon her with an ineffable tenderness and pity, as he replied : “ Do you suppose, then, that I wish you to die, Joanna, *you* who have just preserved my life ? ”

“ No ; you are too generous, too unselfish, to wish that ; but, nevertheless, my death will make you happy, and therefore death is welcome to me. It was but a mad dream of mine—but I am a poor ignorant foolish girl—that I could ever win your love. I see that now. Yet you won mine, all that I had to give, Walter, and you will keep it still ; not like this other one's ” (here she smiled on Lilian) ; “ yet something not altogether worthless to think of now and then, and draw a sigh from you. I hope that I shall not be quite forgotten, Walter ? ”

“ You will never be forgotten, Joanna, while the life that you have given still abides within me.”

“ And if I had lived, you would have kept your word ? ”

“ I would have made you my wife, so help me, Heaven ! ”

“ Brave heart, brave heart ! ” continued Joanna. “ He tells the truth to man and woman. You knew this before, Lilian, but he did not know you knew. Give me your hand, Walter. This hand is mine,” she murmured, carrying it to her parched lips, “ and I have the right to dispose of it. Now, Lilian, give me yours.” Then she took Lilian's hand, and placed it in Walter's. “ You are worthy of him ; you will make him happy, as I never could have done. May Heaven bless you both ! ”

The physical exertion she had used had been very slight, yet she seemed greatly exhausted.

“ Indeed, Joanna, you must say no more,” whispered Lilian, caressing her. “ Walter must go away for the present ; you are doing yourself harm.”

“ As you please,” murmured Joanna with a sad smile, “ though I do not think I can take harm. But before he goes—he is yours now, Lilian ; I have made him over to you—may I ask him to kiss me ? ”

Walter bent low, half-blind with tears, and gave Joanna his first kiss ; it was his last one also ; for she died within an hour or so, quite suddenly, in Lotty's arms, whom she took for Lilian, whose scanty strength had succumbed to the late excitement.

"Be good to him, dear," were the poor girl's last words.
"He is worth all love can give him."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

FOR a few days after the return of the captives, it seemed probable that Walter would have lost not only his plighted bride, but her also to whose loving arms she had bequeathed him. The knowledge of her father's sufferings in the brigand camp, and of the fate which he had so narrowly escaped; her rival's death; and the disclosure of Reginald's perfidy, had so tried Lilian's feeble frame, that it almost lost its foothold upon existence. For weeks she lay, prostrated as before, and only able to see Walter for a few minutes; and it was well nigh winter before she could get about, and, leaning on his arm, face the mild rigours of the Sicilian air. In the meantime, he was, of course, thrown much into the society of Mr. Brown, who seemed as though he could never sufficiently show his contrition for having so unjustly banished him from it, upon that memorable evening at Willow-bank. The merchant had recovered his old ways and habits of command with miraculous elasticity with respect to other people, but to Walter he never failed to exhibit a deferential as well as an affectionate regard. It was, however, expressed in a characteristic way; not demonstratively as to words and manner, but in a sober practical fashion, such as became a pillar of commerce. "I had never believed," said he one evening, as they were smoking together on the verandah of the hotel, "that the phrase, 'His word is as good as his bond,' could be taken in a literal sense; but you indeed have proved it to be so. That you should have come back again from all this life and liberty"—he pointed to the swarming Marina, and the sparkling bay that bordered it, flecked with many a sail—"to death and torture, just because you had given your promise to do so, without an inch of stamped paper, is a very fine thing, my lad. I had come to know you better by that time; but yet I never thought so well of you as to believe you would have returned empty-handed to that den of thieves."

"Well, as to my word being as good as my bond, Mr. Brown," answered Walter, laughing, "that is not so great a compliment as it seems, for I fancy my bond would not be worth much."

"It would be good for fifty thousand pounds, my man," observed the merchant gravely.

"How so, Mr. Brown?"

"Because that is the sum I am going to give you and Lilian for your marriage present. Why not, sir? If I had escaped Corrali's hands by any other means save those you contrived for me, I should have paid the money into the brigand's treasury; and surely one may at least prefer to put it in the pocket of an honest young Englishman. Then the saving my life may be reckoned as some value received, I suppose; not to mention my daughter's life, which, had I been put to death, would, I verily believe, have been sacrificed. Moreover, I am under an immense obligation to you for unmasking that scoundrel, Sir Reginald. What a pretty existence he would have led poor Lotty, and how all my hard-earned gains would have been frittered away on the racecourse or the gambling table, if it had not been for you, my lad! No, no; I won't have a word of thanks, for the obligation will still be upon my own side, after all is done. Pooh, pooh! The money shall be settled upon Lilian and her children, then, if you wish it to be so; though there will be plenty more for them, I daresay. What's hers will be yours, you know, and being a prudent young fellow, I daresay you'll find the income sufficient." And Mr. Christopher Brown chuckled, as, at one time, not so long ago, and in a certain locality, now white with snow, which he could almost catch sight of from where they were sitting, he had hardly thought to chuckle again.

"Have you heard anything more of Sir Reginald, lately, sir?" inquired Walter, after some more talk to the same effect, in which the baronet's name had again been mentioned.

"Yes; I have had a telegraph from his lawyer, inclosed from Naples, this very day: '*My client accepts the terms proposed to him, and will give the undertaking required.*' Of course he will. So long as he gets his thousand a year, paid quarterly, he will be content to remain separated from his beloved wife.

She will be free enough from any molestation from him, you may depend upon it."

Walter nodded, and sighed; he was thinking of the old times when Reginald Selwyn had been a hero in his eyes at school and college. Had he been base from the beginning? he wondered. Was it a false glitter that had dazzled all eyes concerning him, or had his nature deteriorated from circumstances? Had want of money made him value it too highly? and when fortune seemed to be within his grasp, had he been unable to resist the temptation to snatch at it? He had been always selfish, and somewhat hard, but surely not so heartless and cruel as these last days had proved him to be. Nor could Walter forget the impulse of old friendship that had caused the wretched man to follow him along the Marina yonder, as he went to his doom, and strive to save him from it—though only by making him partaker of his crime.

"I am afraid," sighed he, "Lotty will not receive this news with the same satisfaction as yourself, Mr. Brown. After all, this man was her first-love."

"First fiddlesticks!" exclaimed the old merchant impatiently. "You would try to persuade me that my daughter is a fool, to my face! What has she ever got from this man but hard words and insults? Why, I have seen her start when he spoke to her, as though a gun had gone off. No, no; if first-love ever lasts for ever, man, it is only when one has had no experience of it. Not that I mean to say you will soon get tired of Lilian, you know; that's quite a different matter."

"Indeed, sir, I think that I shall not do that," answered Walter, blushing; for he could not but reflect who had been his first-love, and how it would astonish his future father-in-law to learn that it had not been Lilian, but that counterfeit presentment of her (as she had been), her sister. Ill-usage, and the destruction of her brightest illusions, had altered poor Lotty, indeed, since that memorable occasion when he had travelled in her company to Penaddon; but, for the moment, he seemed to see her as she had looked that day.

"Has Sir Reginald returned to London?" inquired Walter, after a long pause, during which, both he and his companion were deep in thought.

"No," replied Mr. Brown; "or, rather, he did return, but

found the place too hot to hold him. The news of his conduct here had arrived before him. I hear, from one of my correspondents, that he was cut at his club, which, it appears, is the severest chastisement society can inflict, though I daresay he is too thick-skinned to feel it."

"You are wrong there, sir," answered Walter gravely; "that is just what he would feel—the very punishment, of all others, under which his undoubted courage would not sustain him."

"Still, it would have been more satisfactory to learn that he was hanged," observed the old merchant grimly; "instead of which, he has only been transported."

"Transported! How do you mean?"

"Oh, I forgot I had not told you. He has gone to live in Paris, with—with"—it was Mr. Brown's turn to blush now, and he did it in a very unmistakable manner—"with that aunt of his, of whom we used to see so much at Willowbank, Mrs. Sheldon. There must be something good about that woman, to make her thus stick to him in his disgrace, and give him what countenance she can."

"Doubtless; yet I think she was a designing woman."

"Very likely," answered Mr. Brown drily; "widows often are."

Then there was another pause, even longer than the preceding. "Walter, my lad," observed the old merchant, as he threw away the end of his cigar, "what on earth was it made you come to Sicily?"

"Well, sir," answered Walter, smiling, "I was advised to do so." Of course there would have been no harm now in confessing the true reason for his exodus, but that would have reopened the whole matter of Reginald's ill conduct—the suspicions that Lilian had entertained of him, &c.—and the topic had been already sufficiently debated.

"Advised? What! by a doctor, do you mean? Considering how fortunate the issue has been for me, I think he deserves a fee."

"Well, no, sir; it was not a doctor, but a very good friend—a painter. If it had not been for his suggestion, I certainly should not have had the opportunity of doing you the service which you are pleased to value at such a fancy price."

"Then that man's pictures shall never want a buyer," cried Mr. Brown excitedly. "What's his name and address?"

"His name is Pelter, and he occupies lodgings in the same house with me in Beech Street. He is a very good artist, though by no means a very successful one; his style——"

"I don't care what his style is," interrupted the merchant in his old arbitrary way, "for I mean to like it, whatever it is. I shall buy what he can't sell, and give him orders for all he paints for the future. If he is your friend, my lad, he is my friend, and I shall make a point of patronising him."

"Indeed, sir," answered Walter, smiling, "I hope you will not attempt to do that."

He had a letter from his friend, in his pocket, at that very time, the second he had received from him—though Jack was as dilatory with his pen as with his brush—since the Corralli affair had been noised abroad; preaching Bohemianism and independence of all sorts, with a private and particular exception in favour of a man who had won an heiress, as a simple knight of old might carry off a king's daughter in a tournament, by his courage and conduct among brigands. "I was convinced, my dear Walter, from the first, that, sooner or later, you would swerve from the faith, and become a domestic character. You will have trouble in the flesh—not to mention the spirits—but I spare you. I believe nature intended you to be a married man in what is satirically termed 'easy circumstances'; nor should I be surprised to see you (afar off) glistening in the sun, even as those who wear polished boots in the daytime. It is the privilege of some, whose friends have been thus turned away from them, to become godfathers to their children, but I am afraid I am hardly fit for even that connection. Still, there will be a link between us, old friend, though it may not be publicly acknowledged. I am indebted to you for many an hour of 'sweet companionship,' the memory of which will always be a treasure to me; the old house here is desolate enough without you, and I dare not go into your rooms; yet it is well for me that I have known and loved you. But 'this is sentiment, sir,' as old Tintac says, when he has concluded his bargain, and can eulogise 'a picture of the affections,' as his own. Talking of pictures, Nellie Neale has been here to break to me the news that she can no longer be a model, ex-

cept of the domestic virtues. She is going to be married to a respectable young fellow in her own rank of life, with which prospect she bids me tell you she is quite content. This is to me a 'dark saying,' unless, indeed, she flatters herself that she might have had Walter Litton, Esq., for the asking. With that young gentleman, it seems it is always Leap-year. Your relations with the Self-made One are indeed a subject for congratulation, and must have afforded you enormous opportunities; surely, surely you have not neglected to take sketches of him when in captivity. Let me suggest a series—*Corralli after Brown; Brown before Corralli; Brown on the Mountain; a Storm; Brown in female Brigand Costume, escaping; Brown laid lifeless by (the wind of) a Musket-bullet*. Keep these by you in the rough; and if anything should disturb your present relations with him, threaten to touch them up—in which my assistance may be of some service, and *publish* them. *Verbum sap.*"

This was a letter, though very significant of the writer, which Walter could hardly shew in its entirety to Mr. Brown, so he confined himself to a *viva voce* description of his friend's characteristics.

"I see," observed the old merchant good-humouredly; "this young gentleman is as proud and independent as his friend; he will have no patron but the dealers, won't he? Then the dealers shall buy them—for me."

The old merchant was as good as his word. It was most surprising—and to no one more than to Jack himself—how very much the demand for Mr. Pelter's pictures increased among the trade from the spring of that date; the effect of which did not much appear indeed in the attire or mode of life of that modest artist, but was very perceptible in the furniture of his studio; for, partly hidden, partly bulging forth under the folds of a picturesque Spanish cloak, hung low, for the purpose of concealing it, was always to be seen in that apartment a vast circular object bound with iron hoops. Jack took in his stout by the barrel.

His apprehensions of a separation from his friend, let us add, were altogether without foundation. Lilian was by no means one of those women who exhibit their devotion to the object of their choice by isolating him from all whom he held dear before his marriage; she made his friend her friend, and

bound her Walter closer to herself, if that were possible, by that new tie. Jack was a frequent and welcome guest at Willowbank, and had at least one prejudice in common with its proprietor: they stood shoulder to shoulder against the practice of putting on evening attire, except on very great occasions. At dinner-parties in the dog-days, Mr. Brown was compelled to wear black broad-cloth, whereas Jack sent his excuses, and sat at home in his shirt-sleeves, with his kind heart full of pity for the victims of society. He had the run of the house, except one Bluebeard's chamber, in which were hung his own pictures, until one day a great City magnate, who knew what was good when he saw it, even out of a soup-tureen, offered to buy the whole lot for twice the fancy price that his host had given for them. Mr. Brown hesitated as to whether he should sell, and send the difference by cheque to Jack—which would probably have cost him his friendship. As it was, he adopted another plan. The next time Jack came, he was shewn into that very room, and just as his brow was getting black with pride and shame (for he guessed all in a moment)—“No wonder you are rather moved, Mr. Pelter,” said the old gentleman, “for I could make fifteen hundred pounds by those pictures to-morrow. However, old Ingot has taken a fancy to your works, and I reckon I shall never get another bargain out of you again.” A remark which had not only delicacy but truth to recommend it, for there is now many a R.A. whose signature on canvas counts far less than that of plain Jack Pelter. “It is as good as my name on stamped paper,” boasts Mr. Christopher Brown, “or as our Walter's word.”

But we are sadly anticipating matters. These things occurred of course long after the two chief personages in the history had been made one.

In the early spring-time, when the flowers were thick upon the grave of Joanna, which was in the very spot which he whom she loved had at one time thought himself to rest, Walter and Lilian were married. It was a very quiet wedding, and yet it was a double one, for Francisco and Julia were united on the same day; nor did the merchant forget the share which the young Sicilian had had in effecting his release from captivity, or that his bride had been Lilian's tender and faithful nurse for many a weary week. Her place as attendant upon Mrs. Wal-

ter Litton was supplied by a handsome young woman, wearing the garb of woe, which, however, became her admirably, and who was not so prostrated by the loss of one swain but that she had already given hopes to several others that they might occupy his shoes. A more charming *soubrette*, in fact, than Lavocca was transformed into—nor a more modest one withal, in spite of her little flirtations—it would have been difficult to find. She left, however, all native lovers despairing, and stepped on board the *Sylphide* fancy-free. The whole party went straight to England in the yacht, their original idea of visiting Rome being abandoned. In vain the banker and other English friends painted the beauties of Italian scenery, and the interest of classical antiquities, in the most attractive colours, as also the safety of the highways and railroads. There were brigands in Italy as well as in Sicily, and Mr. Brown was resolved to run no risks. The state of Lilian's health had alone detained him thus long upon foreign soil, and he was heartily glad to quit it. He had lost, not indeed fifty thousand pounds, he was wont to say, but still a good many pounds—of flesh—while partaking of the hospitality of Captain Corrali, and his health needed to be recruited at home.

Let us take a last look of our friends as they stand upon the deck of the *Sylphide* and wave their hands in farewell to those upon the quay. The consul is there, who strove so gallantly, although in vain, to assist poor Walter in his strait, and who has long got to know and like the young fellow; the banker also, at whose hospitable table—though he little thought to have been able to accept an invitation from him—Walter has often dined, and talked over with him that matter of the “Brown Ransom,” which is to this day the stock story of the house of Gordon. Francisco is there with his new-made bride, and kisses his brown hand in graceful good-bye, while she sheds silent tears. Signor Baccari is also in tears, by no means silent ones, but his grief at the departure of his lodger is no less genuine than demonstrative. Again and again he commends Walter to the protection of the saints, and bids him beware of brigands—a baleful product, which he fancies to be indigenous to every soil. The yacht is loosened from her moorings, sail after sail clothes her delicate spars, and off she glides towards England. The figures of those upon the quay grow

fainter and fainter, till only the fluttering kerchief can be made out which marks Julia's presence ; but the noble hills which are being left for ever are still discernible. To one of these, that stands up straight and sheer to eastward, Walter points in silence, and presses Lilian's arm.

"Yes ; that was once my prison," she answers, for in it was Joanna's cavern. "I do not, however, regret my captivity, since but for it you would not have been mine, Walter."

Here she pauses, gazing up into his face with inexpressible love ; then, as if remorseful for forgetting the woes of others in her own exceeding happiness, her eyes wander to Lotty—husbandless—deprived of what she has gained. "She is happier thus, than she could ever have been with *him*," whispered Walter, in answer to her thought. And indeed, as she stood smiling cheerfully, with her hand upon her father's arm, and in loving converse with him, it might well be hoped that that well-nigh broken heart would heal.

THE END.

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